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A SIMPLETON

VOL. III.

A SIMPLETON

A Story of the Day

By CHARLES READE

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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A SIMPLETON.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Next morning, Staines and Dick Dale walked through the streets of Cape Town side by side. Dick felt the uneasiness of a sane man, not familiar with the mentally afflicted, who suddenly finds himself alone with one. Insanity turns men oftenest into sheep and hares; but it does now and then make them wolves and tigers; and that has saddled the insane in general with a character for ferocity. Young Dale, then, cast many a suspicious glance at his comrade, as he took him along. These glances were reassuring: Christopher's face had

no longer the mobility, the expressive changes, that mark the superior mind; his countenance was monotonous: but the one expression was engaging; there was a sweet, patient, lamb-like look: the glorious eye a little troubled and perplexed, but wonderfully mild. Dick Dale looked and looked, and his uneasiness vanished. And the more he looked the more did a certain wonder creep over him, and make him scarce believe the thing he knew; viz., that a learned doctor had saved him from the jaws of death by rare knowledge, sagacity, courage, and skill combined; and that mighty man of wisdom was brought down to this lamb, and would go north, south, east, or west, with sweet and perfect submission, even as he, Dick Dale, should appoint. With these reflections honest Dick felt his eyes get a little misty, and to use those words of Scripture, which nothing can surpass or equal, his bowels yearned over the man.

As for Christopher, he looked straight forward, and said not a word till they cleared the town; but, when he saw the vast flowery vale, and the far-off violet hills, like Scotland glorified, he turned to Dick with an ineffable expression of sweetness and good fellowship, and said, "Oh, beautiful!—We'll hunt the Past together."

"We—will—*so*," said Dick, with a sturdy and, indeed, almost a stern resolution.

Now, this he said, not that he cared for the Past, nor intended to waste the Present by going upon its predecessor's trail; but he had come to a resolution—full three minutes ago—to humour his companion to the top of his bent, and say "Yes" with hypocritical vigour to everything not directly and immediately destructive to him and his.

The next moment they turned a corner and came upon the rest of their party,

hitherto hidden by the apricot hedge and a turning in the road. A blue-black Kafir, with two yellow Hottentot drivers, man and boy, was harnessing, in the most primitive mode, four horses on to the six oxen attached to the waggon; and the horses were flattening their ears, and otherwise resenting the incongruity. Meantime a fourth figure, a colossal young Kafir woman, looked on superior with folded arms, like a sable Juno, looking down with that absolute composure upon the struggles of man and other animals, which Lucretius and his master Epicurus assigned to the Divine nature. Without jesting, the grandeur, majesty, and repose of this figure were unsurpassable in nature, and such as have vanished from sculpture two thousand years and more.

Dick Dale joined the group immediately, and soon arranged the matter. Meantime, Phœbe descended from the waggon, and welcomed Christopher very kindly, and

asked him if he would like to sit beside her, or to walk.

He glanced into the waggon; it was covered and curtained, and dark as a cupboard. "I think," said he, timidly, "I shall see more of the Past out here."

"So you will, poor soul," said Phœbe, kindly, "and better for your health: but you must not go far from the waggon, for I'm a fidget; and I have got the care of you now, you know, for want of a better. Come, Ucatella; you must ride with me, and help me sort the things; they are all higgledy piggledy. So those two got into the waggon through the back curtains. Then the Kafir driver flourished his kambok, or long whip, in the air, and made it crack like a pistol, and the horses reared, and the oxen started and slowly bored in between them, for they whinnied, and kicked, and spread out like a fan all over the road; but a flick or two from the terrible kambok soon sent them bleeding

and trembling and rubbing shoulders, and the oxen, mildly but persistently goring their recalcitrating haunches, the intelligent animals went ahead, and revenged themselves by breaking the harness. But that goes for little in Cape travel.

The body of the waggon was long and low and very stout. The tilt strong and tight-made. The roof inside, and most of the sides, lined with green baize. Curtains of the same to the little window and the back. There was a sort of hold literally built full of purchases; a small fire-proof safe; huge blocks of salt; saws, axes, pick-axes, adzes, flails, tools innumerable, bales of wool and linen stuff, hams, and two hundred empty sacks strewn over all. In large pigeon-holes fixed to the sides were light goods, groceries, collars, glaring cotton handkerchiefs, for Phœbe's aboriginal domestics, since not every year did she go to Cape Town, a twenty days' journey by waggon: things dangled from the very

roof; but no hard goods there, if you please, to batter one's head in a spill. Outside were latticed grooves with tent, tent-poles, and rifles. Great pieces of cork, and bags of hay and corn, hung dangling from mighty hooks—the latter to feed the cattle, should they be compelled to camp out on some sterile spot in the Veldt, and methinks to act as buffers, should the whole concern roll down a nullah or little precipice, no very uncommon incident in the blessed region they must pass to reach Dale's Kloof.

Harness mended; fresh start. The Hottentots and Kafir vociferated and yelled, and made the unearthly row of a dozen wild beasts wrangling: the horses drew the bullocks, they the waggon; it crawled and creaked, and its appendages wobbled finely.

Slowly they creaked and wobbled past apricot hedges and detached houses and huts, and got into an open country without a tree, but here and there a stunted camel-

thorn. The soil was arid, and grew little food for man or beast; yet, by a singular freak of nature, it put forth abundantly things that here at home we find it harder to raise than homely grass and oats; the ground was thickly clad with flowers of delightful hues; pyramids of snow or rose-colour bordered the track; yellow and crimson stars bejewelled the ground, and a thousand bulbous plants burst into all imaginable colours, and spread a rainbow carpet to the foot of the violet hills; and all this glowed, and gleamed, and glittered in a sun shining with incredible brightness and purity of light, but, somehow, without giving a headache or making the air sultry.

Christopher fell to gathering flowers, and interrogating the Past by means of them; for he had studied botany: the Past gave him back some pitiably vague ideas. He sighed. "Never mind," said he to Dick, and tapped his forehead: "it is here: it is only locked up."

"All right," said Dick; "nothing is lost when you know where 'tis."

"This is a beautiful country," suggested Christopher. "It is all flowers. It is like the garden of—the garden of—locked up."

"It is de—light—ful," replied the self-compelled optimist, sturdily. But here nature gave way; he was obliged to relieve his agricultural bile by getting into the cart and complaining to his sister. "'Twill take us all our time to cure him. He have been bepraising this here soil, which it is only fit to clean the women's kettles. 'Twouldn't feed three larks to an acre, I know; no, *nor half so many.*"

"Poor soul! mayhap the flowers have took his eye. Sit here a bit, Dick. I want to talk to you about a many things."

While these two were conversing, Ucatella, who was very fond of Phœbe, but abhorred waggons, stepped out and stalked by the side, like an ostrich, a camelopard, or a Taglioni; nor did the effort with which

she subdued her stride to the pace of the procession appear: it was the poetry of walking. Christopher admired it a moment; but the noble expanse tempted him, and he strode forth like a giant, his lungs inflating in the glorious air, and soon left the waggon far behind.

The consequence was that when they came to a halt, and Dick and Phœbe got out to release and water the cattle, there was Christopher's figure retiring into space.

"Hanc rem ægrè tulit Phœbe," as my old friend Livy would say. "Oh dear! oh dear! if he strays so far from us, he will be eaten up at nightfall by jackals, or lions, or something. One of you must go after him."

"Me go, missy," said Ucatella, zealously, pleased with an excuse for stretching her magnificent limbs.

"Ay, but mayhap he will not come back with *you*: will he, Dick?"

"That he will, like a lamb." Dick wanted to look after the cattle.

"Yuke," my girl," said Phœbe, "listen. He has been a good friend of ours in trouble; and now he is not quite right *here.* So be very kind to him, but be sure and bring him back, or keep him till we come."

"Me bring him back alive, certain sure," said Ucatella, smiling from ear to ear. She started with a sudden glide, like a boat taking the water, and appeared almost to saunter away, so easy was the motion; but when you looked at the ground she was covering, the stride, or glide, or whatever it was, was amazing:—

"She seem'd in walking to devour the way."

Christopher walked fast, but nothing like this; and, as he stopped at times to botanize and gaze at the violet hills, and interrogate the Past, she came up with him about five miles from the halting-place.

She laid her hand quietly on his shoulder, and said, with a broad genial smile, and a

musical chuckle, "Ucatella come for you. Missy want to speak you."

"Oh! very well:" and he turned back with her directly; but she took him by the hand to make sure: and they marched back peaceably, in silence, and hand in hand. But he looked and looked at her, and at last he stopped dead short, and said, a little arrogantly, "Come, I know *you*. *You* are not locked up:" and he inspected her point-blank. She stood like an antique statue, and faced the examination. "You are 'the noble savage,'" said he, having concluded his inspection.

"Nay," said she. "I be the housemaid."

"The housemaid?"

"Iss, the housemaid, Ucatella. So come on." And she drew him along, sore perplexed.

They met the cavalcade a mile from the halting-place, and Phœbe apologized a little to Christopher. "I hope you'll excuse me,

sir," said she, "but I am just for all the world like a hen with her chickens; if but one strays, I'm all in a flutter till I get him back."

"Madam," said Christopher, "I am very unhappy at the way things are locked up. Please tell me truly, is this 'the housemaid,' or 'the noble savage?'"

"Well, she is both, if you go to that, and the best creature ever breathed."

"Then she *is* 'the noble savage?'"

"Ay, so they call her, because she is black."

"Then, thank Heaven," said Christopher, "the Past is not all locked up."

That afternoon they stopped at an inn. But Dick slept in the cart. At three in the morning they took the road again, and creaked along supernaturally loud under a purple firmament studded with huge stars, all bright as moons, that lit the way quite clear, and showed black things innumerable

flitting to and fro; these made Phœbe shudder, but were no doubt harmless; still Dick carried his double rifle, and a revolver in his belt.

They made a fine march in the cool, until some slight mists gathered, and then they halted and breakfasted near a silvery kloof, and watered the cattle. While thus employed, suddenly a golden tinge seemed to fall like a lash on the vapours of night; they scudded away directly, as jackals before the lion; the stars paled, and, with one incredible bound, the mighty sun leaped into the horizon, and rose into the sky. In a moment all the lesser lamps of heaven were out, though late so glorious, and there was nothing but one vast vaulted turquoise, and a great flaming topaz mounting with eternal ardour to its centre.

This did not escape Christopher. "What is this?" said he. "No twilight. The tropics!" He managed to dig that word out of the Past in a moment.

At ten o'clock the sun was so hot that they halted, and let the oxen loose till sundown. Then they began to climb the mountains.

The way was steep and rugged; indeed, so rough in places, that the cattle had to jump over the holes, and, as the waggon could not jump so cleverly, it jolted appallingly, and many a scream issued forth.

Near the summit, when the poor beasts were dead beat, they got into clouds and storms, and the wind rushed howling at them through the narrow pass with such fury, it flattened the horses' ears, and bade fair to sweep the whole cavalcade to the plains below.

Christopher and Dick walked close behind, under the lee of the waggon. Christopher said in Dick's ear, "D'ye hear that? Time to reef topsails, captain."

"It is time to do *something*," said Dick. He took advantage of a jutting rock, drew the waggon half behind it and across the

road, propped the wheels with stones, and they all huddled to leeward, man and beast indiscriminately.

"Ah!" said Christopher, approvingly; "we are lying to: a very—proper—course."

They huddled and shivered three hours, and then the sun leaped into the sky, and lo! a transformation scene. The cold clouds were first rosy fleeces, then golden ones, then gold dust, then gone: the rain was big diamonds, then crystal sparks, then gone: the rocks and the bushes sparkled with gem-like drops, and shone and smiled.

The shivering party bustled, and toasted the potent luminary in hot coffee; for Phœbe's waggon had a stove and chimney; and then they yoked their miscellaneous cattle again, and breasted the hill. With many a jump, and bump, and jolt, and scream from inside, they reached the summit, and looked down on a vast slope,

flowering but arid, a region of gaudy sterility.

The descent was more tremendous than the ascent, and Phœbe got out, and told Christopher she would liever cross the ocean twice than this dreadful mountain once.

The Hottentot with the reins was now bent like a bow all the time, keeping the cattle from flowing diverse over precipices, and the Kafir with his kambok was here, and there, and everywhere, his whip flicking like a lancet, and cracking like a horse-pistol, and the pair vied like Apollo and Pan, not which could sing sweetest, but swear loudest. Having the lofty hill for some hours between them and the sun, they bumped, and jolted, and stuck in mud-holes, and flogged and swore the cattle out of them again, till at last they got to the bottom, where ran a turbid kloof or stream. It was fordable, but the recent rains had licked away the slope; so the existing bank was two feet above the stream. Little

recked the demon drivers or the parched cattle; in they plunged promiscuously, with a flop like thunder, followed by an awful splashing. The waggon stuck fast in the mud, the horses tied themselves in a knot, and rolled about in the stream, and the oxen drank imperturbably.

"Oh, the salt! the salt!" screamed Phœbe, and the rocks re-echoed her lamentations.

The waggon was inextricable, the cattle done up, the savages lazy: so they stayed for several hours. Christopher botanized; but not alone. Phœbe drew Ucatella apart, and explained to her that when a man is a little wrong in the head, it makes a child of him: "So," said she, "you must think he is your child, and never let him out of your sight."

"All right," said the sable Juno, who spoke English ridiculously well, and rapped out idioms; especially "Come on," and "All right."

About dusk, what the drivers had foreseen, though they had not the sense to explain it, took place; the kloof dwindled to a mere gutter, and the waggon stuck high and dry. Phœbe waved her handkerchief to Ucatella. Ucatella, who had dogged Christopher about four hours without a word, now took his hand, and said, "My child, missy wants us; come on;" and so led him unresistingly.

The drivers, flogging like devils, cursing like troopers, and yelling like hyenas gone mad, tried to get the waggon off; but it was fast as a rock. Then Dick and the Hottentot put their shoulders to one wheel, and tried to prize it up, while the Kafir *encouraged* the cattle with his thong. Observing this, Christopher went in, with his sable custodian at his heels, and heaved at the other embedded wheel. The waggon was lifted directly, so that the cattle tugged it out, and they got clear. On examination, the salt had just escaped.

Says Ucatella to Phœbe, a little ostentatiously, "My child is strong and useful; make little missy a good slave."

"A slave! Heaven forbid!" said Phœbe. "He'll be a father to us all, once he gets his head back: and I do think it is coming—but very slow."

The next three days offered the ordinary incidents of African travel, but nothing that operated much on Christopher's mind, which is the true point of this narrative; and, as there are many admirable books of African travel, it is the more proper I should confine myself to what may be called the relevant incidents of the journey.

On the sixth day from Cape Town, they came up with a large waggon stuck in a mud-hole. There was quite a party of Boers, Hottentots, Kafirs, round it, armed with whips, shamboks, and oaths, lashing and cursing without intermission, or any good effect; and there were the wretched

beasts straining in vain at their choking yokes, moaning with anguish, trembling with terror, their poor mild eyes dilated with agony and fear, and often, when the blows of the cruel shamboks cut open their bleeding flesh, they bellowed to Heaven their miserable and vain protest against this devil's work.

Then the Past opened its stores, and lent Christopher a word.

"BARBARIANS!" he roared, and seized a gigantic Kafir by the throat, just as his shambok descended for the hundredth time. There was a mighty struggle, as of two Titans; dust flew round the combatants in a cloud; a whirling of big bodies, and down they both went with an awful thud, the Saxon uppermost, by Nature's law.

The Kafir's companions, amazed at first, began to roll their eyes and draw a knife or two; but Dick ran forward, and said, "Don't hurt him: he is wrong *here*."

This representation pacified them more

readily than one might have expected. Dick added, hastily, "We'll get you out of the hole *our* way, and cry quits."

The proposal was favourably received, and the next minute Christopher and Ucatella at one wheel, and Dick and the Hottentot at the other, with no other help than two pointed iron bars bought for their shepherds, had effected what sixteen oxen could not. To do this Dick Dale had bared his arm to the shoulder; it was a stalwart limb, like his sister's, and he now held it out all swollen and corded, and slapped it with his other hand. "Look'ee here, you chaps," said he: "the worst use a man can put that there to is to go cutting out a poor beast's heart for not doing more than he can. You are good fellows, you Kafirs; but I think you have sworn never to put your shoulder to a wheel. But, bless your poor silly hearts, a little strength put on at the right place is better than a deal at the wrong."

"You hear that, you Kafir chaps?" inquired Ucatella, a little arrogantly—for a Kafir.

The Kafirs, who had stood quite silent to imbibe these remarks, bowed their heads with all the dignity and politeness of Roman senators, Spanish grandees, &c.; and one of the party replied gravely, "The words of the white man are always wise."

"And his arm blanked* strong," said Christopher's late opponent, from whose mind, however, all resentment had vanished.

Thus spake the Kafirs; yet to this day never hath a man of all their tribe put his shoulder to a wheel, so strong is custom in South Africa; probably in all Africa; since I remember St. Augustin found it stronger than he liked, at Carthage.

Ucatella went to Phœbe, and said, "Missy, my child is good and brave."

"Bother you and your child!" said poor

* I take this very useful expression from a delightful volume by Mr. Boyle.

Phœbe. "To think of his flying at a giant like that, and you letting of him. I'm all of a tremble from head to foot:" and Phœbe relieved herself with a cry.

"Oh, missy!" said Ucatella.

"There, never mind me. Do go and look after your child, and keep him out of more mischief. I wish we were safe at Dale's Kloof, I do."

Ucatella complied, and went botanizing with Dr. Staines: but that gentleman, in the course of his scientific researches into camomile flowers and blasted heath, which were all that lovely region afforded, suddenly succumbed and stretched out his limbs, and said, sleepily, "Good-night—U—cat—" and was off into the land of Nod.

The waggon, which, by-the-way, had passed the larger but slower vehicle, found him fast asleep, and Ucatella standing by him, as ordered, motionless and grand.

"Oh, dear! what now?" said Phœbe: but, being a sensible woman, though in the

hen and chickens line, she said, "'Tis the fighting and the excitement. 'Twill do him more good than harm, I think:" and she had him bestowed in the waggon, and never disturbed him night nor day. He slept thirty-six hours at a stretch; and, when he awoke, she noticed a slight change in his eye. He looked at her with an interest he had not shown before, and said, "Madam, I know you."

"Thank God for that," said Phœbe.

"You kept a little shop, in the other world."

Phœbe opened her eyes with some little alarm.

"You understand—the world that is locked up—for the present."

"Well, sir, so I did: and sold you milk and butter. Don't you mind?"

"No—the milk and butter—they are locked up."

The country became wilder, the signs of life miserably sparse; about every twenty

miles the farmhouse or hut of a degenerate Boer, whose children and slaves pigged together, and all ran jostling, and the mistress screamed in her shrill Dutch, and the Hottentots all chirped together, and confusion reigned for want of method: often they went miles, and saw nothing but a hut or two, with a nude Hottentot eating flesh, burnt a little, but not cooked, at the door; and the kloofs became deeper and more turbid, and Phœbe was in agony about her salt, and Christopher advised her to break it in big lumps, and hang it all about the waggon in sacks; and she did, and Ucatella said, profoundly, "My child is wise;" and they began to draw near home, and Phœbe to fidget; and she said to Christopher, "Oh, dear! I hope they are all alive and well: once you leave home, you don't know what may have happened by then you come back. One comfort, I've got Sophy: she is very dependable, and no beauty, thank my stars."

That night, the last they had to travel,

was cloudy, for a wonder, and they groped with lanterns.

Ucatella and her child brought up the rear. Presently there was a light pattering behind them. The swift-eared Ucatella clutched Christopher's arm, and, turning round, pointed back, with eyeballs white and rolling. There were full a dozen animals following them, whose bodies seemed colourless as shadows, but their eyes little balls of flaming lime-light.

"GUN!" said Christie, and gave the Kafir's arm a pinch. She flew to the caravan: he walked backwards, facing the foe. The waggon was halted, and Dick ran back with two loaded rifles. In his haste he gave one to Christopher, and repented at leisure: but Christopher took it, and handled it like an experienced person, and said, with delight, "VOLUNTEER." But with this the cautious animals had vanished like bubbles. But Dick told Christopher they would be sure to come back; he ordered Ucatella

into the waggon, and told her to warn Phœbe not to be frightened if guns should be fired. This soothing message brought Phœbe's white face out between the curtains, and she implored them to get into the waggon, and not tempt Providence.

"Not till I have got thee a kaross of jackal's fur."

"I'll never wear it!" said Phœbe, violently, to divert him from his purpose.

"Time will show," said Dick, drily. "These varmint are on and off like shadows, and as cunning as Old Nick. We two will walk on quite unconcerned like, and as soon as ever the varmint are at our heels you give us the office; and we'll pepper their fur—won't we, Doctor?"

"We—will—pepper—their fur," said Christopher, repeating what to him was a lesson in the ancient and venerable English tongue.

So they walked on expectant; and by-and-by the four-footed shadows with large

lime-light eyes came stealing on; and Phœbe shrieked, and they vanished before the men could draw a bead on them.

"Thou's no use at this work, Pheeb," said Dick. "Shut thy eyes, and let us have Yuke."

"Iss, master: here I be."

"You can bleat like a lamb; for I've heard ye."

"Iss, master. I bleats beautiful;" and she showed snowy teeth from ear to ear.

"Well, then, when the varmint are at our heels, draw in thy woolly head, and bleat like a young lamb. They won't turn from that, I know, the vagabonds."

Matters being thus prepared, they sauntered on; but the jackals were very wary. They came like shadows, so departed—a great many times: but, at last, being reinforced, they lessened the distance, and got so close, that Ucatella withdrew her head, and bleated faintly inside the waggon. The men turned, levelling their rifles, and found

the troop within twenty yards of them. They wheeled directly: but the four barrels poured their flame, four loud reports startled the night, and one jackal lay dead as a stone, another limped behind the flying crowd, and one lay kicking. He was soon despatched, and both carcases flung over the patient oxen; and good-bye jackals for the rest of that journey.

Ucatella, with all a Kafir's love of fire-arms, clapped her hands with delight. "My child shoots loud and strong," said she.

"Ay, ay," replied Phœbe; "they are all alike; wherever there's men, look for quarrelling and firing off. We had only to sit quiet in the waggon."

"Ay," said Dick, "the cattle especially —for it is them the varmint were after— and let 'em eat my Hottentots."

At this picture of the cattle inside the waggon, and the jackals supping on cold Hottentot alongside, Phœbe, who had no more humour than a cat, but a heart of

gold, shut up, and turned red with confusion at her false estimate of the recent transaction in fur.

When the sun rose they found themselves in a tract somewhat less arid and inhuman; and, at last, at the rise of a gentle slope, they saw, half a mile before them, a large farmhouse partly clad with creepers, and a little plot of turf, the fruit of eternal watering; item, a flower-bed; item, snow-white palings; item, an air of cleanliness and neatness scarcely known to those dirty descendants of clean ancestors, the Boers. At some distance a very large dam glittered in the sun, and a troop of snow-white sheep were watering at it.

"ENGLAND!" cried Christopher.

"Ay, sir," said Phœbe; "as nigh as man can make it." But soon she began to fret: "Oh, dear! where are they all? If it was me, I'd be at the door looking out. Ah, there goes Yuke to rouse them up."

"Come, Pheeb, don't you fidget," said

Dick, kindly. "Why, the lazy lot are scarce out of their beds by this time."

"More shame for 'em. If they were away from me, and coming home, I should be at the door day *and* night, I know. Ah!"

She uttered a scream of delight; for just then out came Ucatella, with little Tommy on her shoulder, and danced along to meet her. As she came close, she raised the chubby child high in the air, and he crowed; and then she lowered him to his mother, who rushed at him, seized, and devoured him with a hundred inarticulate cries of joy and love unspeakable.

"NATURE!" said Christopher, dogmatically, recognising an old acquaintance, and booking it as one more conquest gained over the Past. But there was too much excitement over the cherub to attend to him. So he watched the woman gravely, and began to moralise with all his might. "This," said he, "is what we used to call maternal love; and all animals had it, and that is why

the noble savage went for him. It was very good of you, Miss Savage," said the poor soul, sententiously.

"Good of her!" cried Phœbe. "She is all goodness. Savage; find me a Dutch-woman like her. I'll give her a good cuddle for it:" and she took the Kafir round the neck, and gave her a hearty kiss, and made the little boy kiss her too.

At this moment out came a colly dog, hunting Ucatella by scent alone, which process landed him headlong in the group; he gave loud barks of recognition, fawned on Phœbe and Dick, smelt poor Christopher, gave a growl of suspicion, and lurked about squinting, dissatisfied, and lowering his tail.

"Thou art wrong, lad, for once," said Dick; "for he's an old friend, and a good one."

"After the dog, perhaps some Christian will come to welcome us," said poor Phœbe.

Obedient to the wish out walked Sophy, the English nurse, a scraggy woman, with a

very cocked nose and thin, pinched lips, and an air of respectability and pertness mingled. She dropped a short curtsy, shot the glance of a basilisk at Ucatella, and said, stiffly, "You are welcome home, ma'am." Then she took the little boy as one having authority. Not that Phœbe would have surrendered him: but just then Mr. Falcon strolled out, with a cigar in his mouth, and Phœbe, with her heart in *her* mouth, flew to meet him. There was a rapturous conjugal embrace, followed by mutual inquiries; and the waggon drew up at the door. Then, for the first time, Falcon observed Staines, saw at once he was a gentleman, and touched his hat to him, to which Christopher responded in kind, and remembered he had done so in the locked-up Past.

Phœbe instantly drew her husband apart by the sleeve. "Who do you think that is? You'll never guess. 'Tis the great doctor that saved Dick's life in England with cutting of his throat. But oh, my dear, he

is not the man he was. He is afflicted. Out of his mind partly. Well, we must cure him, and square the account for Dick. I'm a proud woman at finding him, and bringing him here to make him all right again, I can tell you. Oh, I am happy, I am happy. Little did I think to be so happy as I am. And, my dear, I have brought you a whole sackful of newspapers, old and new."

"That is a good girl. But tell me a little more about him. What is his name?"

"Christie."

"Dr. Christie?"

"No doubt. He wasn't an apothecary, or a chemist, you may be sure, but a high doctor, and the cleverest ever was or ever will be: and isn't it sad, love, to see him brought down so? My heart yearns for the poor man: and then his wife—the sweetest, loveliest creature you ever—oh!" Phœbe stopped very short, for she remembered something all of a sudden; nor did she ever again give Falcon a chance of

knowing that the woman, whose presence had so disturbed him, was this very Dr. Christie's wife. "Curious!" thought she to herself, "the world to be so large, and yet so small:" then aloud, "They are unpacking the waggon; come, dear. I don't think I have forgotten anything of yours. There's cigars, and tobacco, and powder, and shot, and bullets, and everything to make you comfortable, as my duty 'tis; and —oh, but I'm a happy woman."

Hottentots, big and little, clustered about the waggon. Treasure after treasure was delivered with cries of delight; the dogs found out it was a joyful time, and barked about the wheeled treasury; and the place did not quiet down till sunset.

A plain but tidy little room was given to Christopher, and he slept there like a top. Next morning his nurse called him up to help her water the grass. She led the way with a tub on her head and two buckets in it. She took him to the dam; when she

got there she took out the buckets, left one on the bank, and gave the other to Christie. She then went down the steps till the water was up to her neck, and bade Christie fill the tub. He poured eight bucketsful in. Then she came slowly out, straight as an arrow, balancing this tub full on her head. Then she held out her hands for the two buckets. Christie filled them, wondering, and gave them to her. She took them like toy buckets, and glided slowly home with this enormous weight, and never spilled a drop. Indeed, the walk was more smooth and noble than ever, if possible.

When she reached the house she hailed a Hottentot, and it cost the man and Christopher a great effort of strength to lower her tub between them.

"What a vertebral column you must have!" said Christopher.

"You must not speak bad words, my child," said she. "Now, you water the grass and the flowers." She gave him a

watering-pot, and watched him maternally; but did not put a hand to it. She evidently considered this part of the business as child's play, and not a fit exercise of her powers.

It was only by drowning that little oasis twice a day that the grass was kept green and the flowers alive.

She found him other jobs in course of the day, and, indeed, he was always helping somebody or other, and became quite ruddy, bronzed, and plump of cheek, and wore a strange look of happiness, except at times when he got apart and tried to recall the distant Past. Then he would knit his brow, and looked perplexed and sad.

They were getting quite used to him, and he to them, when one day he did not come in to dinner. Phœbe sent out for him; but they could not find him.

The sun set. Phœbe became greatly alarmed, and even Dick was anxious.

They all turned out, with guns and dogs, and hunted for him beneath the stars.

Just before daybreak Dick Dale saw a fire sparkle by the side of a distant thicket. He went to it, and there was Ucatella seated, calm and grand as antique statue, and Christopher lying by her side, with a shawl thrown over him. As Dale came hurriedly up, she put her finger to her lips, and said, "My child sleeps. Do not wake him. when he sleeps, he hunts the Past, as Colly hunts the springbok."

"Here's a go," said Dick. Then, hearing a chuckle, he looked up, and was aware of a comical appendage to the scene. There hung, head downwards, from a branch, a Kafir boy, who was, in fact, the brother of the stately Ucatella, only went further into antiquity for his models of deportment; for, as she imitated the antique marbles, he reproduced the habits of that epoch, when man roosted, and was arboreal. Wheel somersaults, and, above all, swinging head downwards from a branch, were the sweeteners of his existence.

"Oh! *you* are there, are you?" said Dick.

"Iss," said Ucatella. "Tim good boy. Tim found my child."

"Well," said Dick, "he has chosen a nice place. This is the clump the last lion came out of, at least they say so. For my part, I never saw an African lion: Falcon says they've all took ship and gone to England. However, I shall stay here with my rifle till daybreak. 'Tis tempting Providence to lie down on the skirt of a wood for Lord knows what to jump out on ye unawares."

Tim was sent home for Hottentots, and Christopher was carried home, still sleeping, and laid on his own bed.

He slept twenty-four hours more, and, when he was fairly awake, a sort of mist seemed to clear away in places, and he remembered things at random. He remembered being at sea on the raft with the dead body; that picture was quite vivid to him. He remembered, too, being in the

hospital, and meeting Phœbe, and every succeeding incident; but as respected the more distant past, he could not recall it by any effort of his will. His mind could only go into that remoter past by material stepping-stones; and what stepping-stones he had about him here led him back to general knowledge, but not to his private history.

In this condition he puzzled them all strangely at the farm; his mind was alternately so clear and so obscure. He would chat with Phœbe, and sometimes give her a good practical hint; but the next moment, helpless for want of memory, that great faculty without which judgment cannot act, having no material.

After some days of this, he had another great sleep. It brought him back the distant past in chapters. His wedding day. His wife's face and dress upon that day. His parting with her: his whole voyage out: but, strange to say, it swept away one-half of that which he had recovered at his

last sleep, and he no longer remembered clearly how he came to be at Dale's Kloof.

Thus his mind might be compared to one climbing a slippery place, who gains a foot or two, then slips back; but, on the whole, gains more than he loses.

He took a great liking to Falcon. That gentleman had the art of pleasing, and the tact never to offend.

Falcon affected to treat the poor soul's want of memory as a common infirmity; pretended he was himself very often troubled in the same way, and advised him to read the newspapers. "My good wife," said he, "has brought me a whole file of the *Cape Gazette*. I'd read them if I was you. The deuce is in it, if you don't rake up something or other."

Christopher thanked him warmly for this: he got the papers to his own little room, and had always one or two in his pocket for reading. At first he found a good many hard words that puzzled him; and he bor-

rowed a pencil of Phœbe, and noted them down. Strange to say, the words that puzzled him were always common words, that his unaccountable memory had forgotten: a hard word, he was sure to remember that.

One day he had to ask Falcon the meaning of "spendthrift." Falcon told him briefly. He could have illustrated the word by a striking example; but he did not. He added, in his polite way, "No fellow can understand all the words in a newspaper. Now, here's a word in mine—'Anemometer;' who the deuce can understand such a word?"

"Oh, *that* is a common word enough," said poor Christopher. "It means a machine for measuring the force of the wind."

"Oh, indeed," said Falcon; but did not believe a word of it.

One sultry day Christopher had a violent headache, and complained to Ucatella. She

told Phœbe, and they bound his brows with a wet handkerchief, and advised him to keep indoors. He sat down in the coolest part of the house, and held his head with his hands, for it seemed as if it would explode into two great fragments.

All in a moment the sky was overcast with angry clouds, whirling this way and that. Huge drops of hail pattered down, and the next minute came a tremendous flash of lightning, accompanied, rather than followed, by a crash of thunder close over their heads.

This was the opening. Down came a deluge out of clouds that looked mountains of pitch, and made the day night but for the fast and furious strokes of lightning that fired the air. The scream of wind and awful peals of thunder completed the horrors of the scene.

In the midst of this, by what agency I know no more than Science or a sheep does, something went off inside Christopher's

head, like a pistol-shot. He gave a sort of scream, and dashed out into the weather.

Phœbe heard his scream and his flying footstep, and uttered an ejaculation of fear. The whole household was alarmed, and, under other circumstances, would have followed him; but you could not see ten yards.

A chill sense of impending misfortune settled on the house. Phœbe threw her apron over her head, and rocked in her chair.

Dick himself looked very grave.

Ucatella would have tried to follow him; but Dick forbade her. "'Tis no use," said he. "When it clears, we that be men will go for him."

"Pray Heaven you may find him alive!"

"I don't think but what we shall. There's nowhere he can fall down to hurt himself, nor yet drown himself, but our dam; and he has not gone that way. But——"

"But what?"

"If we do find him, we must take him back to Cape Town, before he does himself, or some one, a mischief. Why, Phœbe, don't you see the man has gone raving mad?"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE electrified man rushed out into the storm, but he scarcely felt it in his body; the effect on his mind overpowered hailstones. The lightning seemed to light up the Past; the mighty explosions of thunder seemed cannon strokes knocking down a wall, and letting in his whole life.

Six hours the storm raged, and, before it ended, he had recovered nearly his whole Past, except his voyage with Captain Dodd—that, indeed, he never recovered—and the things that happened to him in the hospital before he met Phœbe Falcon and her brother: and, as soon as he had recovered his lost memory, his body began to shiver at the hail and rain. He tried to find his way

home, but missed it; not so much, however, but that he recovered it as soon as it began to clear, and, just as they were coming out to look for him, he appeared before them, dripping, shivering, very pale and worn, with the handkerchief still about his head.

At sight of him, Dick slipped back to his sister, and said, rather roughly, "There now, you may leave off crying: he is come home; and to-morrow I take him to Cape Town."

Christopher crept in, a dismal, sinister figure.

"Oh, sir," said Phœbe, "was this a day for a Christian to be out in? How could you go and frighten us so?"

"Forgive me, madam," said Christopher, humbly; "I was not myself."

"The best thing you can do now is to go to bed, and let us send you up something warm."

"You are very good," said Christopher,

and retired with the air of one too full of great amazing thoughts to gossip.

He slept thirty hours at a stretch, and then, awaking in the dead of night, he saw the past even more clear and vivid; he lighted his candle and began to grope in the *Cape Gazette.* As to dates, he now remembered when he had sailed from England, and also from Madeira. Following up this clue, he found in the *Gazette* a notice that H. M. ship *Amphitrite* had been spoken off the Cape, and had reported the melancholy loss of a promising physician and man of science, Dr. Staines.

The account said every exertion had been made to save him, but in vain.

Staines ground his teeth with rage at this. "Every exertion! the false-hearted curs. They left me to drown, without one manly effort to save me. Curse them, and curse all the world."

Pursuing his researches rapidly he found a much longer account of a raft picked up

by Captain Dodd, with a white man on it and a dead body, the white man having on him a considerable sum in money and jewels.

Then a new anxiety chilled him. There was not a word to identify him with Dr. Staines. The idea had never occurred to the editor of the *Cape Gazette.* Still less would it occur to any one in England. At this moment his wife must be mourning for him. "Poor—poor Rosa!"

But perhaps the fatal news might not have reached her.

That hope was dashed away as soon as found. Why these were all *old newspapers.* That gentlemanly man who had lent them to him had said so.

Old! yet they completed the year 1867.

He now tore through them for the dates alone, and soon found they went to 1868. Yet they were old papers. He had sailed in May, 1867.

"My God!" he cried, in agony, "I HAVE LOST A YEAR."

This thought crushed him. By-and-by he began to carry this awful idea into details. My Rosa has worn mourning for me, and put it off again. I am dead to her, and to all the world.

He wept long and bitterly.

Those tears cleared his brain still more. For all that, he was not yet himself; at least, I doubt it; his insanity, driven from the intellect, fastened one lingering claw into his moral nature, and hung on by it. His soul filled with bitterness and a desire to be revenged on mankind for their injustice, and this thought possessed him more than reason.

He joined the family at breakfast; and never a word all the time. But, when he got up to go, he said, in a strange, dogged way, as if it went against the grain, "God bless the house that succours the afflicted." Then he went out to brood alone.

"Dick," said Phœbe, "there's a change. I'll never part with him: and look, there's

Colly following him, that never could abide him.

"Part with him?" said Reginald. "Of course not. He is a gentleman, and they are not so common in Africa."

Dick, who hated Falcon, ignored this speech entirely, and said, "Well, Pheeb, you and Colly are wiser than I am. Take your own way, and don't blame me if anything happens."

Soon Christopher paid the penalty of returning reason. He suffered all the poignant agony a great heart can endure.

So this was his reward for his great act of self-denial in leaving his beloved wife. He had lost his patient; he had lost the income from that patient; his wife was worse off than before, and had doubtless suffered the anguish of a loving heart bereaved. His mind, which now seemed more vigorous than ever, after its long rest, placed her before his very eyes, pale, and worn with grief, in her widow's cap.

At the picture, he cried like the rain. He could give her joy, by writing; but he could not prevent her from suffering a whole year of misery.

Turning this over in connection with their poverty, his evil genius whispered, "By this time she has received the six thousand pounds for your death. *She* would never think of that; but her father has: and there is her comfort assured, in spite of the caitiffs who left her husband to drown like a dog."

"I know my Rosa," he thought. "She has swooned—ah, my poor darling—she has raved—she has wept—" he wept himself at the thought—"she has mourned every indiscreet act, as if it was a crime. But she *has* done all this. Her good and loving but shallow nature is now at rest from the agonies of bereavement, and nought remains but sad and tender regrets. She can better endure that than poverty: cursed poverty, which has brought her and me to this, and

is the only real evil in the world, but bodily pain."

Then came a struggle, that lasted a whole week, and knitted his brows, and took the colour from his cheek; but it ended in the triumph of love and hate, over conscience and common sense. His Rosa should not be poor; and he would cheat some of those contemptible creatures called men, who had done him nothing but injustice, and at last had sacrificed his life like a rat's.

When the struggle was over, and the fatal resolution taken, then he became calmer, less solitary, and more sociable.

Phœbe, who was secretly watching him with a woman's eye, observed this change in him, and, with benevolent intentions, invited him one day to ride round the farm with her. He consented readily. She showed him the fields devoted to maize and wheat, and then the sheep-folds. Tim's sheep were apparently deserted; but he was discovered swinging head downwards

from the branch of a camel-thorn, and seeing him, it did strike one that if he had had a tail he would have been swinging by that. Phœbe called to him: he never answered, but set off running to her, and landed himself under her nose in a wheel somersault.

"I hope you are watching them, Tim," said his mistress.

"Iss, missy, always washing 'em."

"Why there's one straying towards the wood now."

"He not go far," said Tim, coolly. The young monkey stole off a little way, then fell flat, and uttered the cry of a jackal, with startling precision. Back went the sheep to his comrades post haste, and Tim effected a somersault and a chuckle.

"You are a clever boy," said Phœbe. "So that is how you manage them."

"Dat one way, missy," said Tim, not caring to reveal all his resources at once.

Then Phœbe rode on, and showed Christopher the ostrich pan. It was a large

basin, a form the soil often takes in these parts; and in it strutted several full-grown ostriches and their young, bred on the premises. There was a little dam of water, and plenty of food about. They were herded by a Cafir infant of about six, black, glossy, fat, and clean, being in the water six times a day.

Sometimes one of the older birds would show an inclination to stray out of the pan. Then the infant rolled after her, and tapped her ancles with a wand. She instantly came back, but without any loss of dignity, for she strutted with her nose in the air, affecting completely to ignore the inferior little animal, that was nevertheless controlling her movements. "There's a farce," said Phœbe. "But you would not believe the money they cost me, nor the money they bring me in. Grain will not sell here for a quarter its value: and we can't afford to send it to Cape Town, twenty days and back; but finery, that sells everywhere. I

gather sixty pounds the year off those poor fowls' backs—clear profit."

She showed him the granary, and told him there wasn't such another in Africa. This farm had belonged to one of the old Dutch settlers, and that breed had been going down this many a year. "You see, sir, Dick and I being English, and not downright in want of money, we can't bring ourselves to sell grain to the middlemen for nothing, so we store it, hoping for better times, that maybe will never come. Now I'll show you how the dam is made."

They inspected the dam all round. "This is our best friend of all," said she. "Without this the sun would turn us all to tinder, crops, flowers, beasts, and folk."

"Oh indeed," said Staines. "Then it is a pity you have not built it more scientifically. I must have a look at this."

"Ay do, sir, and advise us if you see anything wrong. But hark! it is milking time. Come and see that." So she led the

way to some sheds, and there they found several cows being milked, each by a little calf and a little Hottentot at the same time, and both fighting and jostling each other for the udder. Now and then a young cow unused to incongruous twins, would kick impatiently at both animals and scatter them.

"That is their way," said Phœbe: "they have got it into their silly Hottentot heads as kye won't yield their milk if the calf is taken away; and it is no use arguing with 'em; they will have their own way; but they are very trusty and honest, poor things. We soon found that out. When we came here first it was in a hired waggon, and Hottentot drivers: so when we came to settle I made ready for a bit of a wrangle. But my maid Sophy, that is nurse now, and a great despiser of heathens, she says, 'Don't you trouble; them nasty ignorant blacks never charges more than their due.' 'I forgive 'em,' says I; 'I wish all white folk was as nice.' However, I did give

them a trifle over, for luck: and then they got together and chattered something near the door, hand in hand. 'La, Sophy,' says I, what is up now?' Says she, 'They are blessing of us. Things is come to a pretty pass, for ignorant Muslinmen heathen to be blessing Christian folk.' 'Well,' says I, 'it won't hurt us any.' 'I don't know,' says she. 'I don't want the devil prayed over me.' So she cocked that long nose of hers and followed it in a doors."

By this time they were near the house, and Phœbe was obliged to come to her postscript, for the sake of which, believe me, she had uttered every syllable of this varied chat. "Well, sir," said she, affecting to proceed without any considerable change of topic, "and how do you find yourself? Have you discovered the Past?"

"I have, madam. I remember every leading incident of my life."

"And has it made you happier?" said Phœbe, softly.

"No," said Christopher, gravely. "Memory has brought me misery."

"I feared as much; for you have lost your fine colour, and your eyes are hollow, and lines on your poor brow that were not there before. Are you not sorry you have discovered the Past?"

"No, Mrs. Falcon. Give me the sovereign gift of reason, with all the torture it can inflict. I thank God for returning memory, even with the misery it brings."

Phœbe was silent a long time: then she said, in a low, gentle voice, and with the indirectness of a truly feminine nature, "I have plenty of writing-paper in the house; and the post goes south to-morrow, such as 'tis.

Christopher struggled with his misery, and trembled.

He was silent a long time. Then he said, "No. It is her interest that I should be dead."

"Well, but sir—take a thought."

"Not a word more, I implore you. I am

the most miserable man that ever breathed." As he spoke, two bitter tears forced their way.

Phœbe cast a look of pity on him, and said no more; but she shook her head. Her plain common sense revolted.

However, it did not follow he would be in the same mind next week: so she was in excellent spirits at her protegé's recovery, and very proud of her cure, and celebrated the event with a roaring supper, including an English ham, and a bottle of port wine; and, ten to one, that was English too.

Dick Dale looked a little incredulous, but he did not spare the ham any the more for that.

After supper, in a pause of conversation, Staines turned to Dick, and said, rather abruptly, "Suppose that dam of yours were to burst and empty its contents, would it not be a great misfortune to you?"

"Misfortune, sir! Don't talk of it. Why, it would ruin us, beast and body."

"Well, it will burst, if it is not looked to."

"Dale's Kloof dam burst! the biggest and strongest for a hundred miles round."

"You deceive yourself. It is not scientifically built, to begin, and there is a cause at work that will infallibly burst it, if not looked to in time."

"And what is that, sir?"

"The dam is full of crabs."

"So 'tis; but what of them?"

"I detected two of them that had perforated the dyke from the wet side to the dry, and water was trickling through the channel they had made. Now, for me to catch two that had come right through, there must be a great many at work honeycombing your dyke; those channels, once made, will be enlarged by the permeating water, and a mere cupful of water forced into a dyke by the great pressure of a heavy column has an expansive power quite out of proportion to the quantity forced in.

Colossal dykes have been burst in this way with disastrous effects. Indeed it is only a question of time, and I would not guarantee your dyke twelve hours. It is full, too, with the heavy rains."

"Here's a go!" said Dick, turning pale. "Well, if it is to burst, it must."

"Why so? You can make it safe in a few hours. You have got a clumsy contrivance for letting off the excess of water: let us go and relieve the dam at once of two feet of water. That will make it safe for a day or two, and to-morrow we will puddle it afresh, and demolish those busy excavators."

He spoke with such authority and earnestness, that they all got up from table; a horn was blown that soon brought the Hottentots, and they all proceeded to the dam. With infinite difficulty they opened the waste sluice, lowered the water two feet, and so drenched the arid soil that in forty-eight hours flowers unknown sprang up.

Next morning, under the Doctor's orders,

all the black men and boys were diving with lumps of stiff clay and puddling the endangered wall with a thick wall of it. This took all the people the whole day.

Next day the clay wall was carried two feet higher, and then the Doctor made them work on the other side and buttress the dyke with supports so enormous as seemed extravagant to Dick and Phœbe; but, after all, it was as well to be on the safe side, they thought: and soon they were sure of it, for the whole work was hardly finished when the news came in that the dyke of a neighbouring Boer, ten miles off, had exploded like a cannon, and emptied itself in five minutes, drowning the farmyard and floating the furniture, but leaving them all to perish of drought; and indeed the Boer's cart came every day, with empty barrels, for some time, to beg water of the Dales. Ucatella pondered all this, and said her doctor child was wise.

This brief excitement over, Staines went

back to his own gloomy thoughts, and they scarcely saw him, except at supper-time.

One evening he surprised them all by asking if they would add to all their kindness by lending him a horse, and a spade, and a few pounds, to go to the diamond fields.

Dick Dale looked at his sister. She said, "We had rather lend them you to go home with, sir, if you must leave us; but, dear heart, I was half in hopes—Dick and I were talking it over only yesterday—that you would go partners like with us; ever since you saved the dam."

"I have too little to offer for that, Mrs. Falcon; and, besides, I am driven into a corner. I must make money quickly, or not at all: the diamonds are only three hundred miles off: for heaven's sake, let me try my luck."

They tried to dissuade him, and told him not one in fifty did any good at it.

"Ay, but *I* shall," said he. "Great bad luck is followed by great good luck,

and I feel my turn is come. Not that I rely on luck. An accident directed my attention to the diamond a few years ago, and I read a number of prime works upon the subject that told me of things not known to the miners. It is clear, from the Cape journals, that they are looking for diamonds in the river only. Now, I am sure that is a mistake. Diamonds, like gold, have their matrix, and it is comparatively few gems that get washed into the river. I am confident that I shall find the volcanic matrix, and perhaps make my fortune in a week or two."

When the dialogue took this turn, Reginald Falcon's cheek began to flush, and his eyes to glitter.

Christopher continued. "You who have befriended me so will not turn back, I am sure, when I have such a chance before me; and as for the small sum of money I shall require, I will repay you some day, even if——"

"La, sir, don't talk so. If you put it that way, why the best horse we have, and fifty pounds in good English gold, they are at your service to-morrow."

"And pick and spade to boot," said Dick, "and a double rifle, for there are lions, and Lord knows what, between this and the Vaal river."

"God bless you both!" said Christopher. "I will start to-morrow."

"And I'll go with you," said Reginald Falcon.

CHAPTER XX.

"HEAVEN forbid!" said Phœbe. "No, my dear, no more diamonds for us. We never had but one, and it brought us trouble."

"Nonsense, Phœbe," replied Falcon; "it was not the diamond's fault. You know I have often wanted to go there; but you objected. You said you were afraid some evil would befall me. But now Solomon himself is going to the mines, let us have no more of that nonsense. We will take our rifles and our pistols."

"There—there—rifles and pistols," cried Phœbe; "that shows."

"And we will be there in a week; stay a month, and home with our pockets full of diamonds."

"And find me dead of a broken heart."

"Broken fiddlestick! We have been parted longer than that, and yet here we are all right."

"Ay, but the pitcher that goes too often to the well gets broke at last. No, Reginald, now I have tasted three years' happiness and peace of mind, I cannot go through what I used in England. Oh, Doctor! have you the heart to part man and wife, that have never been a day from each other all these years?"

"Mrs. Falcon, I would not do it for all the diamonds in Brazil. No, Mr. Falcon, I need hardly say how charmed I should be to have your company: but that is a pleasure I shall certainly deny myself, after what your good wife has said. I owe her too much to cause her a single pang."

"Doctor," said the charming Reginald, "you are a gentleman and side with the lady. Quite right. It adds to my esteem, if possible. Make your mind easy; I will

go alone. I am not a farmer. I am dead sick of this monotonous life; and, since I am compelled to speak my mind, a little ashamed, as a gentleman, of living on my wife and her brother, and doing nothing for myself. So I shall go to the Vaal river, and see a little life; here there's nothing but vegetation—and not much of that. Not a word more, Phœbe, if you please. I am a good, easy, affectionate husband, but I am a man, and not a child to be tied to a woman's apron-strings, however much I may love and respect her."

Dick put in his word. "Since you are so independent, you can *walk* to the Vaal river. I can't spare a couple of horses."

This hit the Sybarite hard, and he cast a bitter glance of hatred at his brother-in-law; and fell into a moody silence.

But, when he got Phœbe to himself, he descanted on her selfishness, Dick's rudeness, and his own wounded dignity, till he made her quite anxious he should have his

own way. She came to Staines, with red eyes, and said, "Tell me, Doctor, will there be any women up there—to take care of you?"

"Not a petticoat in the place, I believe. It is a very rough life: and how Falcon could think of leaving you and sweet little Tommy, and this life of health, and peace, and comfort——"

"Yet *you* do leave us, sir."

"I am the most unfortunate man upon the earth; Falcon is one of the happiest. Would I leave wife and child to go there? Ah me! I am dead to those I love. This is my one chance of seeing my darling again for many a long year perhaps. Oh, I must not speak of *her*—it unmans me. My good, kind friend, I'll tell you what to do. When we are all at supper, let a horse be saddled and left in the yard for me. I'll bid you all good night, and I'll put fifty miles between us before morning. Even then *he* need not be told I am gone; he will not follow me."

"You are very good, sir," said Phœbe; "but no. Too much has been said. I can't have him humbled by my brother, nor any one. He says I am selfish. Perhaps I am; though I never was called so. I can't bear he should think me selfish. He *will* go: and so let us have no ill blood about it. Since he is to go, of course I'd much liever he should go with you than by himself. You are sure there are no women up there—to take care of—you—both? You must be purse-bearer, sir, and look to every penny. He is too generous when he has got money to spend."

In short, Reginald had played so upon hen heart, that she now urged the joint expedition, only she asked a delay of a day or two to equip them, and steel herself to the separation.

Staines did not share those vague fears that overpowered the wife, whose bitter experiences were unknown to him; but he felt uncomfortable at her condition—for

now she was often in tears—and he said all he could to comfort her; and he also advised her how to profit by these terrible diamonds, in her way. He pointed out to her that her farm lay right in the road to the diamonds, yet the traffic all shunned her, passing twenty miles to the westward. Said he, "You should profit by all your resources. You have wood, a great rarity in Africa; order a portable forge; run up a building where miners can sleep, another where they can feed; the grain you have so wisely refused to sell, grind it into flour."

"Dear heart! why there's neither wind nor water to turn a mill."

"But there are oxen. I'll show you how to make an ox-mill. Send your Cape cart into Cape Town for iron lathes, for coffee, and tea, and groceries by the hundred-weight. The moment you are ready—for success depends on the order in which we act—then prepare great boards, and plant them twenty miles south. Write, or paint,

on them, very large, 'The nearest way to the Diamond Mines, through Dale's Kloof, where is excellent accommodation for man and beast. Tea, coffee, home-made bread, fresh butter, etc., etc.' Do this, and you will soon leave off decrying diamonds. This is the sure way to coin them. I myself take the doubtful way; but I can't help it. I am a dead man, and swift good fortune will give me life. You can afford to go the slower road and the surer."

Then he drew her a model of an ox-mill, and of a miner's dormitory, the partitions six feet six apart, so that these very partitions formed the bedstead, the bed-sacking being hooked to the uprights. He drew his model for twenty bed-rooms.

The portable forge and the ox-mill pleased Dick Dale most, but the partitioned bedsteads charmed Phœbe. She said, "Oh, Doctor, how can one man's head hold so many things? If there's a man on earth I can trust my husband with, 'tis you. But,

if things go cross up there, promise me you will come back at once and cast in your lot with us. We have got money and stock, and you have got headpiece: we might do very well together. Indeed, indeed we might. Promise me. Oh do, please, promise me!"

"I promise you."

And, on this understanding, Staines and Falcon were equipped with rifles, pickaxe, shovels, waterproofs, and full saddle-bags, and started, with many shakings of the hand, and many tears from Phœbe, for the diamond washings.

CHAPTER XXI.

PHŒBE'S tears at parting made Staines feel uncomfortable, and he said so.

"Pooh, pooh!" said Falcon: "crying for nothing does a woman good."

Christopher stared at him.

Falcon's spirits rose as they proceeded. He was like a boy let loose from school. His fluency and charm of manner served, however, to cheer a singularly dreary journey.

The travellers soon entered on a vast and forbidding region, that wearied the eye: at their feet a dull, rusty carpet of dried grass and wild camomile, with pale red sand peeping through the burnt and scanty herbage. On the low mounds, that looked like

heaps of sifted ashes, struggled now and then into sickliness a ragged, twisted shrub. There were flowers too, but so sparse, that they sparkled vainly in the colourless waste, which stretched to the horizon. The farm-houses were twenty miles apart, and nine out of them were new ones built by the Boers, since they degenerated into white savages: mere huts, with domed kitchens behind them. In the dwelling-house the whole family pigged together, with raw flesh drying on the rafters, stinking skins in a corner, parasitical vermin of all sorts blackening the floor, and particularly a small, biting, and odoriferous tortoise, compared with which the insect a London washer-woman brings into your house in her basket, is a stroke with a feather—and all this without the excuse of penury; for many of these were shepherd kings, sheared four thousand fleeces a year, and owned a hundred horses and horned cattle.

These Boers are compelled, by unwritten

law, to receive travellers and water their cattle; but our travellers after one or two experiences, ceased to trouble them; for, added to the dirt, the men were sullen, the women moody, silent, brainless; the whole reception churlish. Staines detected in them an uneasy consciousness that they had descended, in more ways than one, from a civilised race; and the superior bearing of a European seemed to remind them what they had been, and might have been, and were not; so, after an attempt or two, our adventurers avoided the Boers, and tried the Kafirs. They found the savages socially superior, though their moral character does not rank high.

The Kafir cabins they entered were caves, lighted only by the door, but deliciously cool, and quite clean; the floors of puddled clay or ants' nests, and very clean. On entering these cool retreats, the flies, that had tormented them, shirked the cool grot, and buzzed off to the nearest farm to batten

on congenial foulness. On the fat, round, glossy babies not a speck of dirt, whereas the little Boers were cakes thereof. The Kafir would meet them at the door, his clean black face all smiles and welcome. The women and grown girls would fling a spotless handkerchief over their shoulders in a moment, and display their snowy teeth, in unaffected joy at sight of an Englishman.

At one of these huts, one evening, they met with something St. Paul ranks above cleanliness even, viz., Christianity. A neighbouring lion had just eaten a Hottentot *faute de mieux;* and these good Kafirs wanted the Europeans not to go on at night and be eaten for dessert. But they could not speak a word of English, and pantomimic expression exists in theory alone. In vain the women held our travellers by the coat tails, and pointed to a distant wood. In vain Kafir *père* went on all-fours and growled sore. But at last a savage youth ran to the kitchen—for they never cook in

the house—and came back with a brand, and sketched, on the wall of the hut, a lion with a mane down to the ground, and a saucer eye, not loving. The creature's paw rested on a hat and coat and another fragment or two of a European. The rest was foreshortened, or else eaten.

The picture completed, the females looked, approved, and raised a dismal howl.

"A lion on the road," said Christopher, gravely.

Then the undaunted Falcon seized the charcoal, and drew an Englishman in a theatrical attitude, left foot well forward, firing a gun, and a lion rolling head over heels like a buck rabbit, and blood squirting out of a hole in his perforated carcase.

The savages saw, and exulted. They were so off their guard as to confound representation with fact; they danced round the white warrior, and launched him to victory.

"Aha!" said Falcon, "I took the shine out of their lion, didn't I?"

"You did: and once there was a sculptor who showed a lion his marble group, a man trampling a lion, extracting his tongue, and so on; but report says, it *did not convince the lion.*"

"Why no; a lion is not an ass. But, for your comfort, there *are* no lions in this part of the world. They are myths. There were lions in Africa. But now they are all at the Zoo. And I wish I was there too."

"In what character—of a discontented animal—with every blessing? They would not take you in; too common in England. Hallo! this is something new. What lots of bushes! We should not have much chance with a lion here."

"There *are* no lions: it is not the Zoo," said Falcon; but he spurred on faster.

The country, however, did not change its feature; bushes and little acacias prevailed, and presently dark forms began to glide across at intervals.

The travellers held their breath, and

pushed on; but at last their horses flagged; so they thought it best to stop and light a fire and stand upon their guard.

They did so, and Falcon sat with his rifle cocked, while Staines boiled coffee, and they drank it, and after two hours' halt, pushed on; and at last the bushes got more scattered, and they were on the dreary plain again. Falcon drew the rein, with a sigh of relief, and they walked their horses side by side.

"Well, what has become of the lions?" said Falcon, jauntily. He turned in his saddle, and saw a large animal stealing behind them with its belly to the very earth, and eyes hot coals; he uttered an eldrich screech, fired both barrels, with no more aim than a baby, and spurred away, yelling like a demon. The animal fled another way, in equal trepidation at those tongues of flame and loud reports, and Christopher's horse reared and plunged, and deposited him promptly on the sward; but he held the bridle, mounted again, and rode after his

companion. A stern chase is a long chase; and for that or some other reason he could never catch him again till sunrise. Being caught, he ignored the lioness, with cool hauteur: he said he had ridden on to find comfortable quarters: and craved thanks.

This was literally the only incident worth recording that the companions met with in three hundred miles.

On the sixth day out, towards afternoon, they found by inquiring they were near the diamond washings, and the short route was pointed out by an exceptionally civil Boer.

But Christopher's eye had lighted upon a sort of chain of knolls, or little round hills, devoid of vegetation, and he told Falcon he would like to inspect these, before going farther.

"Oh," said the Boer, "they are not on my farm, thank goodness: they are on my cousin Bulteel's;" and he pointed to a large white house about four miles distant, and

quite off the road. Nevertheless, Staines insisted on going to it. But first they made up to one of these knolls, and examined it; it was about thirty feet high, and not a vestige of herbage on it; the surface was composed of sand and of lumps of grey limestone very hard, diversified with lots of quartz, mica, and other old formations.

Staines got to the top of it, with some difficulty, and examined the surface all over. He came down again, and said, "All these little hills mark hot volcanic action—why they are like boiling earth-bubbles—which is the very thing, under certain conditions, to turn carbonate of lime into diamonds. Now here is plenty of limestone unnaturally hard; and, being in a diamond country, I can fancy no place more likely to be the matrix than these earth-bubbles. Let us tether the horses, and use our shovels."

They did so; and found one or two common crystals, and some jasper, and a piece of chalcedony all in little bubbles, but no

diamond. Falcon said it was wasting time.

Just then, the proprietor, a gigantic, pasty colonist, came up, with his pipe, and stood calmly looking on. Staines came down, and made a sort of apology. Bulteel smiled quietly, and asked what harm they could do him, raking that rubbish. "Rake it all avay, mine vriends," said he: "ve shall thank you moch."

He then invited them languidly to his house. They went with him, and as he volunteered no more remarks, they questioned him, and learned his father had been a Hollander, and so had his vrow's. This accounted for the size and comparative cleanliness of his place. It was stuccoed with the lime of the country outside, and was four times as large as the miserable farmhouses of the degenerate Boers. For all this, the street door opened on the principal room, and that room was kitchen and parlour, only very large, and wholesome.

"But Lord," as poor dear Pepys used to blurt out—"to see how some folk understand cleanliness!" The floor was made of powdered ants' nests, and smeared with fresh cow-dung every day. Yet these people were the cleanest Boers in the colony.

The vrow met them, with a snow-white collar and cuffs of Hamburgh linen, and the brats had pasty faces round as pumpkins, but shone with soap. The vrow was also pasty-faced, but gentle, and welcomed them with a smile, languid, but unequivocal.

The Hottentots took their horses, as a matter of course. Their guns were put in a corner. A clean cloth was spread, and they saw they were to sup and sleep there, though the words of invitation were never spoken.

At supper, sun-dried flesh, cabbage, and a savoury dish the travellers returned to with gusto. Staines asked what it was: the vrow told him—locusts. They had stripped her garden, and filled her very rooms, and fallen

in heaps under her walls; so she had pressed them, by the million, into cakes, had salted them lightly, and stored them, and they were excellent, baked.

After supper, the accomplished Reginald, observing a wire guitar, tuned it with some difficulty, and so twanged it, and sang ditties to it, that the flabby giant's pasty face wore a look of dreamy content over his everlasting pipe; and in the morning, after a silent breakfast, he said, "Mine vriends, stay here a year or two, and rake in mine rubbish. Ven you are tired, here are springbok and antelopes, and you can shoot mit your rifles, and ve vil cook them, and you shall zing us zongs of Vaderland."

They thanked him heartily, and said they would stay a few days, at all events.

The placid Boer went a farming; and the pair shouldered their pick and shovel, and worked on their heap all day, and found a number of pretty stones, but no diamond.

"Come," said Falcon, we must go to the

river:" and Staines acquiesced. "I bow to experience," said he.

At the threshold they found two of the little Bulteels, playing with pieces of quartz, crystal, etc., on the door-stone. One of these stones caught Staines's eye directly. It sparkled in a different way from the others: he examined it: it was the size of a white haricot bean, and one side of it polished by friction. He looked at it, and looked, and saw that it refracted the light. He felt convinced it was a diamond.

"Give the boy a penny for it," said the ingenious Falcon, on receiving the information.

"Oh!" said Staines. "Take advantage of a child?"

He borrowed it of the boy, and laid it on the table, after supper. "Sir," said he, "this is what we were raking in your kopjes for, and could not find it. It belongs to little Hans. Will you sell it us? We are not experts, but we think it may be a

diamond. We will risk ten pounds on it."

"Ten pounds!" said the farmer. "Nay, we rob not travellers, mine vriend."

"But, if it is a diamond, it is worth a hundred. See how it gains fire in the dusk."

In short, they forced the ten pounds on him, and next day went to work on another kopje.

But the simple farmer's conscience smote him. It was a slack time; so he sent four Hottentots, with shovels, to help these friendly maniacs. These worked away gaily, and the white men set up a sorting table, and sorted the stuff, and hammered the nodules, and at last found a little stone as big as a pea that refracted the light. Staines showed this to the Hottentots, and their quick eyes discovered two more that day, only smaller.

Next day, nothing but a splinter or two.

Then Staines determined to dig deeper, contrary to the general impression. He gave his reason: "Diamonds don't fall from the sky. They work up from the ground; and clearly the heat must be greater farther down."

"Acting on this, they tried the next strata, but found it entirely barren. After that, however, they came to a fresh layer of carbonate, and here, Falcon hammering a large lump of conglomerate, out leaped, all of a sudden, a diamond big as a nut, that ran along the earth, gleaming like a star. It had polished angles and natural facets, and even a novice, with an eye in his head, could see it was a diamond of the purest water. Staines and Falcon shouted with delight, and made the blacks a present on the spot.

They showed the prize, at night, and begged the farmer to take to digging. There was ten times more money beneath his soil than on it.

Not he. He was a farmer: did not believe in diamonds.

Two days afterwards, another great find. Seven small diamonds.

Next day, a stone as large as a cob-nut, and with strange and beautiful streaks. They carried it home to dinner, and set it on the table, and told the family it was worth a thousand pounds. Bulteel scarcely looked at it; but the vrow trembled and all the young folk glowered at it.

In the middle of dinner, it exploded like a cracker, and went literally into diamond-dust.

"Dere goes von tousand pounds," said Bulteel, without moving a muscle.

Falcon swore. But Staines showed fortitude. "It was laminated," said he, "and exposure to the air was fatal."

Owing to the invaluable assistance of the Hottentots, they had in less than a month collected four large stones of pure water, and a wineglassful of small stones, when,

one fine day, going to work calmly after breakfast, they found some tents pitched, and at least a score of dirty diggers, bearded like the pard, at work on the ground. Staines sent Falcon back to tell Bulteel, and suggest that he should at once order them off, or, better still, make terms with them. The phlegmatic Boer did neither.

In twenty-four hours it was too late. The place was rushed. In other words, diggers swarmed to the spot, with no idea of law but digger's law.

A thousand tents rose like mushrooms; and poor Bulteel stood smoking, and staring amazed, at his own door, and saw a veritable possession of waggons, Cape carts, and powdered travellers file past him to take possession of his hillocks. Him, the proprietor, they simply ignored; they had a committee, who were to deal with all obstructions, landlords and tenants included. They themselves measured out Bulteel's farm into thirty-foot claims, and went to

work with shovel and pick. They held Staines's claim sacred—that was diggers' law; but they confined it strictly to thirty feet square.

Had the friends resisted, their brains would have been knocked out. However, they gained this, that dealers poured in, and, the market not being yet glutted, the price was good: Staines sold a few of the small stones for two hundred pounds. He showed one of the larger stones. The dealer's eye glittered, but he offered only three hundred pounds, and this was so wide of the ascending scale, on which a stone of that importance is priced, that Staines reserved it for sale at Cape Town.

Nevertheless, he afterwards doubted whether he had not better have taken it; for the multitude of diggers turned out such a prodigious number of diamonds at Bulteel's pan, that a sort of panic fell on the market.

These dry diggings were a revelation to the world. Men began to think the dia-

mond, perhaps, was a commoner stone than any one had dreamed it to be.

As to the discovery of stones, Staines and Falcon lost nothing by being confined to a thirty-foot claim. Compelled to dig deeper, they got into a rich strata, where they found garnets by the pint, and some small diamonds, and at last, one lucky day, their largest diamond. It weighed thirty-seven carats, and was a rich yellow. Now, when a diamond is clouded or off colour, it is terribly depreciated; but a diamond with a positive colour is called a fancy stone, and ranks with the purest stones.

"I wish I had this in Cape Town," said Staines.

"Why I'll take it to Cape Town, if you like," said the changeable Falcon.

"You will?" said Christopher, surprised.

"Why not? I'm not much of a digger. I can serve our interest better by selling. I could get a thousand pounds for this at Cape Town."

"We will talk of that quietly," said Christopher.

Now, the fact is Falcon, as a digger, was not worth a pin. He could not sort. His eyes would not bear the blinding glare of a tropical sun upon lime and dazzling bits of mica, quartz, crystal, white topaz, &c., in the midst of which the true glint of the royal stone had to be caught in a moment. He could not sort, and he had not the heart to dig. The only way to make him earn his half was to turn him into the travelling and selling partner.

Christopher was too generous to tell him this; but he acted on it, and said he thought his was an excellent proposal: indeed he had better take all the diamonds they had got to Dale's Kloof first, and show them to his wife, for her consolation: "And perhaps," said he, "in a matter of this importance, she will go to Cape Town with you, and try the market there."

"All right," said Falcon.

He sat and brooded over the matter a long time, and said, "Why make two bites of a cherry? They will only give us half the value at Cape Town: why not go by the steamer to England, before the London market is glutted, and all the world finds out that diamonds are as common as dirt?"

"Go to England! What, without your wife? I'll never be a party to that. Me part man and wife! If you knew my own story——"

"Why, who wants you?" said Reginald. "You don't understand. Phœbe is dying to visit England again; but she has got no excuse. If you like to give her one, she will be much obliged to you, I can tell you."

"Oh, that is a very different matter. If Mrs. Falcon can leave her farm——"

"Oh, that brute of a brother of hers is a very honest fellow, for that matter. She can trust the farm to him. Besides, it is only a month's voyage by the mail steamer."

This suggestion of Falcon's set Christopher's heart bounding, and his eyes glistening. But he restrained himself, and said, "This takes me by surprise; let me smoke a pipe over it."

He not only did that, but he lay awake all night.

The fact is that for some time past, Christopher had felt sharp twinges of conscience, and deep misgivings as to the course he had pursued in leaving his wife a single day in the dark. Complete convalescence had cleared his moral sentiments, and, perhaps, after all, the discovery of the diamonds had co-operated; since now the insurance money was no longer necessary to keep his wife from starving.

"Ah!" said he; "faith is a great quality; and how I have lacked it!"

To do him justice, he knew his wife's excitable nature, and was not without fears of some disaster, should the news be communicated to her unskilfully.

But this proposal of Falcon's made the way clearer. Mrs. Falcon, though not a lady, had all a lady's delicacy, and all a woman's tact and tenderness. He knew no one in the world more fit to be trusted with the delicate task of breaking to his Rosa that the grave, for once, was baffled, and her husband lived. He now became quite anxious for Falcon's departure, and ardently hoped that worthy had not deceived himself as to Mrs. Falcon's desire to visit England.

In short, it was settled that Falcon should start for Dale's Kloof, taking with him the diamonds, believed to be worth altogether three thousand pounds at Cape Town, and nearly as much again in England, and a long letter to Mrs. Falcon, in which Staines revealed his true story, told her where to find his wife, or hear of her, viz., at Kent Villa, Gravesend, and sketched an outline of instructions as to the way, and cunning degrees, by which the joyful news should be broken to her. With this he sent a long

letter to be given to Rosa herself, but not till she should know all; and in this letter he enclosed the ruby ring she had given him. That ring had never left his finger, by sea or land, in sickness or health.

The letter to Rosa was sealed. The two letters made quite a packet; for, in the letter to his beloved Rosa, he told her everything that had befallen him. It was a romance, and a picture of love; a letter to lift a loving woman to heaven, and almost reconcile her to all her bereaved heart had suffered.

This letter, written with many tears from the heart that had so suffered, and was now softened by good fortune and bounding with joy, Staines entrusted to Falcon, together with the other diamonds, and, with many warm shakings of the hand, started him on his way.

"But mind, Falcon," said Christopher, "I shall expect an answer from Mrs. Falcon in twenty days at farthest. I do not feel

so sure as you do that she wants to go to England; and, if not, I must write to Uncle Philip. Give me your solemn promise, old fellow, an answer in twenty days —if you have to send a Kafir on horseback."

"I give you my honour," said Falcon, superbly.

"Send it to me at Bulteel's Farm."

"All right. 'Dr. Christie, Bulteel's Farm.'"

"Well—no. Why should I conceal my real name any longer from such friends as you and your wife? Christie is short for Christopher—that *is* my Christian name; but my surname is Staines. Write to 'Dr. Staines.'"

"Dr. Staines!"

"Yes. Did you ever hear of me?"

Falcon wore a strange look. "I almost think I have. Down at Gravesend, or somewhere."

"That is curious. Yes, I married my

Rosa there; poor thing! God bless her; God comfort her. She thinks me dead."

His voice trembled, he grasped Falcon's cold hand, till the latter winced again, and so they parted, and Falcon rode off muttering, "Dr. Staines! so then *you* are Dr. Staines."

CHAPTER XXII.

Rosa Staines had youth on her side, and it is an old saying that youth will not be denied. Youth struggled with death for her, and won the battle.

But she came out of that terrible fight weak as a child. The sweet pale face—the widow's cap, the suit of deep black—it was long ere these came down from the sick room. And, when they did, oh, the dead blank! The weary, listless life! The days spent in sighs, and tears, and desolation. Solitude! solitude! Her husband was gone, and a strange woman played the mother to her child before her eyes.

Uncle Philip was devotedly kind to her, and so was her father; but they could do nothing for her.

Months rolled on, and skinned the wound over. Months could not heal. Her boy became dearer and dearer, and it was from him came the first real drops of comfort, however feeble.

She used to read her lost one's diary every day, and worship, in deep sorrow, the mind she had scarcely respected, until it was too late. She searched in this diary to find his will, and often she mourned that he had written on it so few things she could obey. Her desire to obey the dead, whom, living, she had often disobeyed, was really simple and touching. She would mourn to her father that there were so few commands to her in his diary. "But," said she, "memory brings me back his will in many things, and to obey is now the only sad comfort I have."

It was in this spirit she now forced herself to keep accounts. No fear of her wearing stays now; no powder; no trimmings; no waste.

After the usual delay, her father told her she should instruct a solicitor to apply to the insurance company for the six thousand pounds. She refused with a burst of agony. "The price of his life," she screamed. "Never! I'd live on bread and water sooner than touch that vile money."

Her father remonstrated gently. But she was immovable. "No. It would be like consenting to his death."

Then Uncle Philip was sent for.

He set her child on her knee; and gave her a pen. "Come," said he, sternly, "be a woman, and do your duty to little Christie."

She kissed the boy, cried, and did her duty meekly. But, when the money was brought her, she flew to Uncle Philip, and said, "There! there!" and threw it all before him, and cried as if her heart would break. He waited patiently, and asked her what he was to do with all that: invest it?"

"Yes, yes; for my little Christie."

"And pay you the interest quarterly."

"Oh, no, no. Dribble us out a little as we want it. That is the way to be truly kind to a simpleton. I hate that word."

"And suppose I run off with it? Such confiding geese as you corrupt a man."

"I shall never corrupt you. Crusty people are the soul of honour."

"Crusty people!" cried Philip, affecting amazement. "What are they?"

She bit her lip and coloured a little; but answered adroitly, "They are people that pretend not to have good hearts, but have the best in the world; far better ones than your smooth ones: that's crusty people."

"Very well," said Philip; "and I'll tell you what simpletons are. They are little transparent-looking creatures that look shallow, but are as deep as old Nick, and make you love them in spite of your judgment. They are the most artful of their sex; for they always achieve its great object, to be

loved—the very thing that clever women sometimes fail in."

"Well, and if we are not to be loved, why live at all—such useless things as I am?" said Rosa simply.

So Philip took charge of her money, and agreed to help her save money for her little Christopher. Poverty should never destroy him, as it had his father.

As months rolled on, she crept out into public a little; but always on foot, and a very little way from home.

Youth and sober life gradually restored her strength, but not her colour, nor her buoyancy.

Yet she was, perhaps, more beautiful than ever; for a holy sorrow chastened and sublimed her features: it was now a sweet, angelic, pensive beauty, that interested every feeling person at a glance.

She would visit no one; but, a twelvemonth after her bereavement, she received a few chosen visitors.

One day a young gentleman called, and sent up his card, "Lord Tadcaster," with a note from Lady Cicely Treherne, full of kindly feeling. Uncle Philip had reconciled her to Lady Cicely; but they had never met.

Mrs. Staines was much agitated at the very name of Lord Tadcaster; but she would not have missed seeing him for the world.

She received him, with her beautiful eyes wide open, to drink in every lineament of one who had seen the last of her Christopher.

Tadcaster was wonderfully improved: he had grown six inches out at sea, and, though still short, was not diminutive; he was a small Apollo, a model of symmetry, and had an engaging, girlish beauty, redeemed from downright effeminacy by a golden moustache like silk, and a tanned cheek that became him wonderfully.

He seemed dazzled at first by Mrs.

Staines, but murmured that Lady Cicely had told him to come, or he would not have ventured.

"Who can be so welcome to me as you?" said she, and the tears came thick in her eyes directly.

Soon, he hardly knew how, he found himself talking of Staines, and telling her what a favourite he was, and all the clever things he had done.

The tears streamed down her cheeks, but she begged him to go on telling her, and omit nothing.

He complied heartily, and was even so moved by the telling of his friend's virtues, and her tears and sobs, that he mingled his tears with hers. She rewarded him by giving him her hand as she turned away her tearful face to indulge the fresh burst of grief his sympathy evoked.

When he was leaving, she said, in her simple way, "Bless you."—"Come again," she said: "you have done a poor widow good."

Lord Tadcaster was so interested and charmed, he would gladly have come back next day to see her; but he restrained that extravagance, and waited a week.

Then he visited her again. He had observed the villa was not rich in flowers, and he took her down a magnificent bouquet, cut from his father's hot-houses. At sight of him, or at sight of it, or both, the colour rose for once in her pale cheek, and her pensive face wore a sweet expression of satisfaction. She took his flowers, and thanked him for them, and for coming to see her.

Soon they got on the only topic she cared for, and, in the course of this second conversation, he took her into his confidence and told her he owed everything to Dr. Staines. "I was on the wrong road altogether, and he put me right. To tell you the truth, I used to disobey him now and then, while he was alive, and I was always the worse for it; now he is gone I never disobey him. I have written down a lot of wise, kind things

he said to me, and I never go against any one of them. I call it my book of oracles. Dear me, I might have brought it with me."

"Oh, yes; why didn't you?"—rather reproachfully.

"I will bring it next time."

"Pray do."

Then she looked at him with her lovely swimming eyes, and said tenderly, "And so here is another that disobeyed him living, but obeys him dead. What will you think when I tell you that I, his wife, who now worship him, when it is too late, often thwarted and vexed him when he was alive?"

"No, no. He told me you were an angel, and I believe it."

"An angel! a good-for-nothing foolish woman—who sees everything too late."

"Nobody else should say so before me," said the little gentleman, grandly. "I shall take *his* word before yours on this one subject. If ever there was an angel, you are

one, and oh! what would I give if I could but say or do anything in the world to comfort you."

"You can do nothing for *me*, dear, but come and see me often, and talk to me as you do—on the one sad theme my broken heart has room for."

This invitation delighted Lord Tadcaster, and the sweet word "dear," from her lovely lips, entered his heart and ran through all his veins like some rapturous but dangerous elixir. He did not say to himself, "She is a widow with a child, feels old with grief, and looks on me as a boy, who has been kind to her." Such prudence and wariness were hardly to be expected from his age. He had admired her at first sight, very nearly loved her at their first interview, and now this sweet word opened a heavenly vista. The generous heart that beat in his small frame burned to console her with a life-long devotion and all the sweet offices of love.

He ordered his yacht to Gravesend—for he had become a sailor—and then he called on Mrs. Staines, and told her, with a sort of sheepish cunning, that now, as his yacht *happened* to be at Gravesend, he could come and see her very often. He watched her timidly, to see how she would take that proposition.

She said, with the utmost simplicity, "I'm very glad of it."

Then he produced his oracles; and she devoured them. Such precepts to Tadcaster as she could apply to her own case she instantly noted in her memory, and they became her law from that moment.

Then, in her simplicity, she said, "And I will show you some things, in his own handwriting, that may be good for you: but I can't show you the whole book; some of it is sacred from every eye but his wife's. His wife's? Ah me! his widow's."

Then she pointed out passages in the diary that she thought might be for his

good; and he nestled to her side, and followed her white finger with loving eyes, and was in an Elysium—which she would certainly have put a stop to at that time, had she divined it. But all wisdom does not come at once to an unguarded woman. Rosa Staines was wiser about her husband than she had been, but she had plenty to learn.

Lord Tadcaster anchored off Gravesend, and visited Mrs. Staines nearly every day. She received him with a pleasure that was not at all lively, but quite undisguised. He could not doubt his welcome; for once, when he came, she said to the servant, "Not at home," a plain proof she did not wish his visit to be cut short by any one else.

And so these visits and devoted attentions of every kind went on unobserved by Lord Tadcaster's friends, because Rosa would never go out, even with him: but, at last, Mr. Lusignan saw plainly how this would end, unless he interfered.

Well, he did not interfere; on the contrary, he was careful to avoid putting his daughter on her guard: he said to himself, "Lord Tadcaster does her good. I'm afraid she would not marry him, if he was to ask her now; but in time she might. She likes him a great deal better than any one else."

As for Philip, he was abroad for his own health, somewhat impaired by his long and faithful attendance on Rosa.

So now Lord Tadcaster was in constant attendance on Rosa. She was languid, but gentle and kind; and, as mourners, like invalids, are apt to be egotistical, she saw nothing but that he was a comfort to her in her affliction.

While matters were so, the Earl of Miltshire, who had long been sinking, died, and Tadcaster succeeded to his honours and estates.

Rosa heard of it, and, thinking it was a great bereavement, wrote him one of those exquisite letters of condolence a lady alone

can write. He took it to Lady Cicely, and showed it her. She highly approved it.

He said, "The only thing—it makes me ashamed, I do not feel my poor father's death more; but, you know, it has been so long expected." Then he was silent a long time; and then he asked her if such a woman as that would not make him happy, if he could win her.

It was on her ladyship's tongue to say, "She did not make her first happy;" but she forbore, and said, coldly, that was maw than she could say.

Tadcaster seemed disappointed by that, and by-and-by Cicely took herself to task. She asked herself what were Tadcaster's chances in the lottery of wives. The heavy army of scheming mothers, and the light cavalry of artful daughters, rose before her cousinly and disinterested eyes, and she asked herself what chance poor little Tadcaster would have of catching a true love, with a hundred female artists manœuvring,

wheeling, ambuscading, and charging upon his wealth and titles. She returned to the subject of her own accord, and told him she saw but one objection to such a match: the lady had a son by a man of rare merit and misfortune. Could he, at his age, undertake to be a father to that son? "Othahwise," said Lady Cicely, "maak my words, you will quall over that poor child; and you will have two to quall with, because I shall be on her side."

Tadcaster declared to her that child should be quite the opposite of a bone of contention. "I have thought of that," said he, "and I mean to be so kind to that boy, I shall *make* her love me for that."

On these terms Lady Cicely gave her consent.

Then he asked her should he write, or ask her in person.

Lady Cicely reflected. "If you write, I think she will say no."

"But if I go?"

"Then it will depend on how you do it. Rosa Staines is a true mourner. Whatever you may think, I don't believe the idea of a second union has ever entered her head. But then she is very unselfish: and she likes you better than any one else, I daresay. I don't think your title or your money will weigh with her now. But, if you show her your happiness depends on it, she may perhaps cwy and sob at the very idea of it, and then, after all, say, 'Well, why not—if I can make the poor soul happy?'"

So, on this advice, Tadcaster went down to Gravesend, and Lady Cicely felt a certain self-satisfaction; for her well-meant interference having lost Rosa one husband, she was pleased to think she had done something to give her another.

Lord Tadcaster came to Rosa Staines; he found her seated with her head upon her white hand, thinking sadly of the past.

At sight of him in deep mourning, she started, and said "Oh!"

Then she said, tenderly, "We are of one colour now," and gave him her hand.

He sat down beside her, not knowing how to begin.

"I am not Tadcaster now. I am Earl of Miltshire."

"Ah, yes; I forgot," said she, indifferently.

"This is my first visit to any one in that character."

"Thank you."

"It is an awfully important visit to me. I could not feel myself independent, and able to secure your comfort and little Christie's, without coming to the lady, the only lady I ever saw, that—oh, Mrs. Staines—Rosa—who could see you, as I have done—mingle his tears with yours, as I have done, and not love you, and long to offer you his love?"

"Love! to me, a broken-hearted woman, with nothing to live for but his memory and his child."

She looked at him with a sort of scared amazement.

"His child shall be mine. His memory is almost as dear to me as to you."

"Nonsense, child, nonsense!" said she, almost sternly.

"Was he not my best friend? Should I have the health I enjoy, or even be alive, but for him? Oh, Mrs. Staines—Rosa, you will not live all your life unmarried; and who will love you as I do? You are my first and only love; my happiness depends on you."

"Your happiness depend on me! Heaven forbid—a woman of my age, that feels so old, old, old."

"You are not old; you are young, and sad, and beautiful, and my happiness depends on you." She began to tremble a little. Then he kneeled at her knees, and implored her, and his hot tears fell upon the hand she put out to stop him, while she turned her head away, and the tears began to run.

Oh! never can the cold dissecting pen tell what rushes over the heart that has loved and lost, when another true love first kneels and implores for love, or pity, or anything the bereaved can give.

CHAPTER XXIII.

When Falcon went, luck seemed to desert their claim; day after day went by without a find; and the discoveries on every side made this the more mortifying.

By this time the diggers at Bulteel's pan were as miscellaneous as the audience at Drury Lane Theatre, only mixed more closely; the gallery folk and the stalls worked cheek by jowl. Here a gentleman with an affected lisp, and close by an honest fellow, who could not deliver a sentence without an oath, or some still more horrible expletive that meant nothing at all in reality, but served to make respectable flesh creep: interspersed with these, Hottentots, Kafirs, and wild blue blacks gaily clad in

an ostrich feather, a scarlet ribbon, and a Tower musket, sold them by some good Christian for a modern rifle.

On one side of Staines were two swells, who lay on their backs and talked opera half the day; but seldom condescended to work without finding a diamond of some sort.

After a week's deplorable luck, his Kafir boy struck work on account of a sore in his leg; the sore was due to a very common cause, the burning sand had got into a scratch, and festered. Staines, out of humanity examined the sore; and proceeding to clean it, before bandaging, out popped a diamond worth forty pounds, even in the depreciated market. Staines quietly pocketed it, and bandaged the leg. This made him suspect his blacks had been cheating him on a large scale, and he borrowed Hans Bulteel to watch them, giving him a third, with which Master Hans was mightily pleased. But they

could only find small diamonds, and by this time prodigious slices of luck were reported on every side. Kafirs and Boers, that would not dig, but traversed large tracts of ground when the sun was shining, stumbled over diamonds. One Boer pointed to a waggon and eight oxen, and said that one lucky glance on the sand had given him that lot: but day after day Staines returned home, covered with dust, and almost blinded, yet with little or nothing to show for it.

One evening, complaining of his change of luck, Bulteel quietly proposed to him migration. "I am going," said he resignedly: "and you can come with me."

"You leave your farm, sir? Why, they pay you ten shillings a claim, and that must make a large return; the pan is fifteen acres."

"Yes, mine vriend," said the poor Hollander, "they pay; but deir money it cost too dear. Vere is mine peace? Dis farm

is six tousand acres. If de cursed diamonds was farther off, den it vas vell. But dey are too near. Once I could smoke in peace, and zleep. Now diamonds is come, and zleep and peace is fled. Dere is four tousand tents, and to each tent a dawg; dat dawg bark at four tousand other dawgs all night, and dey bark at him and at each oder. Den de masters of de dawgs dey get angry, and fire four tousand pistole at de four tousand dawgs, and make my bed shake wid the trembling of mine vrow. My vamily is with diamonds infected. Dey vill not vork. Dey takes long valks, and always looks on de ground. Mine childre shall be hump-backed, round-shouldered, looking down for diamonds. Dey shall forget Gott. He is on high: dere eyes are always on de earth. De diggers found a diamond in mine plaster of mine wall of mine house. Dat plaster vas limestone; it come from dose kopjes de good Gott made in His anger against man for his vicked-

ness. I zay so. Dey not believe me. Dey tink dem abominable stones grow in mine house, and break out in mine plaster like de measle: dey vaunt to dig in mine wall, in mine garden, in mine floor. One day dey shall dig in mine body. I vill go. Better I love peace, dan money. Here is English company make me offer for mine varm. Dey forgive de diamonds."

"You have not accepted it?" cried Staines, in alarm.

"No, but I vill. I have said I shall tink of it. Dat is my vay. So I say yah."

"An English company? They will cheat you without mercy. No, they shall not, though, for I will have a hand in the bargain."

He set to work directly, added up the value of the claims, at ten shillings per month, and amazed the poor Hollander by his statement of the value of those fifteen acres, capitalized.

And, to close this part of the subject, the

obnoxious diamonds obtained him three times as much as his father had given for the whole six thousand acres.

The company got a great bargain, but Bulteel received what for him was a large capital, and settling far to the south, this lineal descendant of "le philosophe sans le savoir" carried his godliness, his cleanliness, and his love of peace, out of the turmoil, and was happier than ever, since now he could compare his placid existence with one year of noise and clamour.

But long before this, events more pertinent to my story had occurred.

One day, a Hottentot came into Bulteel's farm, and went about among the diggers, till he found Staines. The Hottentot was one employed at Dale's Kloof, and knew him. He brought Staines a letter.

Staines opened the letter, and another letter fell out; it was directed to "Reginald Falcon, Esq."

"Why," thought Staines, "what a time

this letter must have been on the road. So much for private messengers."

The letter ran thus:—

"DEAR SIR,

"This leaves us all well at Dale's Kloof, as I hope it shall find you and my dear husband at the diggings. Sir, I am happy to say I have good news for you. When you got well by God's mercy, I wrote to the doctor at the hospital, and told him so. I wrote unbeknown to you, because I had promised him. Well, sir, he has written back to say you have two hundred pounds in money, and a great many valuable things, such as gold and jewels. They are all at the old bank in Cape Town, and the cashier has seen you, and will deliver them on demand. So that is the first of my good news, because it is good news to you. But, dear sir, I think you will be pleased to hear that Dick and I are thriving wonderfully, thanks to your good

advice. The wooden house it is built, and a great oven. But, sir, the traffic came almost before we were ready, and the miners that call here, coming and going, every day, you would not believe, likewise waggons and carts. It is all bustle, morn till night, and dear Reginald will never be dull here now; I hope you will be so kind as tell him so, for I do long to see you both home again.

"Sir, we are making our fortunes. The grain we could not sell at a fair price, we sell as bread, and higher than in England ever so much. Tea and coffee the same, and the poor things praise us, too, for being so moderate. So, sir, Dick bids me say that we owe this to you, and if so be you are minded to share, why nothing would please us better. Head-piece is always worth money in these parts; and if it hurts your pride to be our partner without money, why you can throw in what you have at the Cape, though we don't ask that.

And, besides, we are offered diamonds a bargain every day, but are afraid to deal, for want of experience; but if you were in it with us, you must know them well by this time, and we might turn many a good pound that way. Dear sir, I hope you will not be offended, but I think this is the only way we have, Dick and I, to show our respect and good-will.

"Dear sir, digging is hard work, and not fit for you and Reginald, that are gentlemen, amongst a lot of rough fellows, that their talk makes my hair stand on end, though I daresay they mean no harm.

"Your bedroom is always ready, sir. I never will let it to any of them, hoping now to see you every day. You that know everything, can guess how I long to see you both home. My very good fortune seems not to taste like good fortune, without those I love and esteem to share it. I shall count how many days this letter will take to reach you, and then I shall pray

for your safety harder than ever, till the blessed hour comes when I see my husband, and my good friend, never to part again, I hope, in this world.

"I am, Sir,

"Your dutiful servant and friend,

"PHŒBE DALE."

"P.S. There is regular travelling to and from Cape Town, and a Post now to Pniel, but I thought it surest to send by one that knows you."

Staines read this letter with great satisfaction. He remembered his two hundred pounds, but his gold and jewels puzzled him. Still it was good news, and pleased him not a little. Phœbe's good fortune gratified him too, and her offer of a partnership, especially in the purchase of diamonds from returning diggers. He saw a large fortune to be made; and, wearied and disgusted with recent ill-luck, blear-eyed and

almost blinded with sorting in the blazing sun, he resolved to go at once to Dale's Kloof. Should Mrs. Falcon be gone to England with the diamonds, he would stay there, and Rosa should come out to him, or he would go and fetch her.

He went home, and washed himself, and told Bulteel he had had good news, and should leave the diggings at once. He gave him up the claim, and told him to sell it by auction. It was worth two hundred pounds still. The good people sympathised with him, and he started within an hour. He left his pickaxe and shovel, and took only his double rifle, an admirable one, some ammunition, including conical bullets and projectile shells given him by Falcon, a bag full of carbuncles and garnets he had collected for Ucatella; a few small diamonds, and one hundred pounds—all that remained to him, since he had been paying wages and other things for months, and had given Falcon twenty for his journey.

He rode away, and soon put twenty miles between him and the diggings.

He came to a little store that bought diamonds and sold groceries and tobacco. He haltered his horse to a hook, and went in. He offered a small diamond for sale. The master was out, and the assistant said there was a glut of these small stones, he did not care to give money for it.

"Well, give me three dozen cigars."

While they were chaffering, in walked a Hottentot, and said, "Will you buy this?" and laid a clear, glittering stone on the counter, as large as a walnut.

"Yes," said the young man. "How much?"

"Two hundred pounds."

"Two hundred pounds! Let us look at it:" he examined it, and said he thought it was a diamond, but these large stones were so deceitful, he dared not give two hundred pounds. "Come again in an hour," said he; "then the master will be in."

"No," said the Hottentot, quietly, and walked out.

Staines, who had been literally perspiring at the sight of this stone, mounted his horse and followed the man. When he came up to him, he asked leave to examine the gem. The Hottentot quietly assented.

Staines looked at it all over. It had a rough side and a polished side, and the latter was of amazing softness and lustre. It made him tremble. He said, "Look here, I have only one hundred pounds in my pocket."

The Hottentot shook his head.

"But if you will go back with me to Bulteel's farm, I'll borrow the other hundred."

The Hottentot declined, and told him he could get four hundred pounds for it by going back to Pniel. "But," said he, "my face is turned so; and when Squat turn his face so, he going home. Not can bear go

the other way then;" and he held out his hand for the diamond.

Staines gave it him, and was in despair at seeing such a prize so near, yet leaving him.

He made one more effort. "Well, but," said he, "how far are you going this way?"

"Ten days."

"Why, so am I. Come with me to Dale's Kloof, and I will give the other hundred. See, I am in earnest, for here is one hundred, at all events."

Staines made this proposal, trembling with excitement. To his surprise and joy, the Hottentot assented, though with an air of indifference; and, on these terms, they became fellow travellers, and Staines gave him a cigar. They went on side by side, and halted for the night forty miles from Bulteel's farm.

They slept in a Boer's outhouse, and the vrow was civil, and lent Staines a jackal's

skin. In the morning he bought it, for a diamond, a carbuncle, and a score of garnets; for a horrible thought had occurred to him, if they stopped at any place where miners were, somebody might buy the great diamond over his head. This fear, and others, grew on him, and, with all his philosophy, he went on thorns, and was the slave of the diamond.

He resolved to keep his Hottentot all to himself if possible. He shot a springbok that crossed the road, and they roasted a portion of the animal, and the Hottentot carried some on with him.

Seeing he admired the rifle, Staines offered it him for the odd hundred pounds; but, though Squat's eye glittered a moment, he declined.

Finding that they met too many diggers and carts, Staines asked his Hottentot was there no nearer way to reach that star, pointing to one he knew was just over Dale's Kloof.

Oh yes, he knew a nearer way, where there were trees, and shade, and grass, and many beasts to shoot.

"Let us take that way," said Staines.

The Hottentot, ductile as wax, except about the price of the diamond, assented calmly; and next day they diverged, and got into forest scenery, and their eyes were soothed with green glades here and there, wherever the clumps of trees sheltered the grass from the pauting sun. Animals abounded, and were tame; Staines, an excellent marksman, shot the Hottentot his supper without any trouble.

Sleeping in the wood, with not a creature near but Squat, a sombre thought struck Staines. Suppose this Hottentot should assassinate him for his money, who would ever know? The thought was horrible, and he awoke with a start ten times that night. The Hottentot slept like a stone, and never feared for his own life and precious booty; Staines was compelled to own to himself he

had less faith in human goodness than the savage had. He said to himself, "He is my superior. He is the master of this dreadful diamond, and I am its slave."

Next day they went on till noon, and then they halted at a really delightful spot; a silver kloof ran along a bottom, and there was a little clump of three acacia trees that lowered their long tresses, pining for the stream, and sometimes getting a cool grateful kiss from it when the water was high.

They haltered the horse, bathed in the stream, and lay luxurious under the acacias. All was delicious languor and enjoyment of life.

The Hottentot made a fire, and burnt the remains of a little sort of kangaroo Staines had shot him the evening before; but it did not suffice his maw, and, looking about him, he saw three elands leisurely feeding about three hundred yards off. They were cropping the rich herbage close to the shelter of a wood.

The Hottentot suggested that this was an excellent opportunity. He would borrow Staines's rifle, steal into the wood, crawl on his belly close up to them, and send a bullet through one.

Staines did not relish the proposal. He had seen the savage's eye repeatedly gloat on the rifle, and was not without hopes he might even yet relent, and give the great diamond for the hundred pounds and this rifle; and he was so demoralised by the diamond, and filled with suspicions, that he feared the savage, if he once had the rifle in his possession, might levant, and be seen no more, in which case he, Staines, still the slave of the diamond, might hang himself on the nearest tree, and so secure his Rosa the insurance money, at all events. In short, he had really diamond on the brain.

He hem'd and haw'd a little at Squat's prop[illegible] and then got out of it by saying, [illegible] ot necessary. I can shoot it

"It is too far," objected Blacky.

"Too far! This is an Enfield rifle. I could kill the poor beast at three times that distance."

Blacky was amazed. "An Enfield rifle," said he, in the soft musical murmur of his tribe, which is the one charm of the poor Hottentot; "and shoot three times *so* far."

"Yes," said Christopher. Then, seeing his companion's hesitation, he conceived a hope. "If I kill that eland from here, will you give me the diamond, for my horse and the wonderful rifle—no Hottentot has such a rifle."

Squat became cold directly. "The price of the diamond is two hundred pounds."

Staines groaned with disappointment, and thought to himself, with rage, "Anybody but me would club the rifle, give the obstinate black brute a stunner, and take the diamond—God forgive me!"

Says the Hottentot, cunningly, "I can't think so far as white man. Let me see the

eland dead, and then I shall know how far the rifle shoot."

"Very well," said Staines. But he felt sure the savage only wanted his meal, and would never part with the diamond, except for the odd money.

However, he loaded his left barrel with one of the explosive projectiles Falcon had given him; it was a little fulminating shell with a steel point. It was with this barrel he had shot the murcat overnight, and he had found he shot better with this barrel than the other. He loaded his left barrel then, saw the powder well up, capped it, and cut away a strip of the acacia with his knife to see clear, and, lying down in volunteer fashion, elbow on ground, drew his bead steadily on an eland who presented him her broadside, her back being turned to the wood. The sun shone on her soft coat, and never was a fairer mark, the sportsman's deadly eye being in the cool shade, the animal in the sun.

He aimed long and steadily. But, just as he was about to pull the trigger, Mind interposed, and he lowered the deadly weapon. "Poor creature!" he said, "I am going to take her life—for what? for a single meal. She is as big as a pony; and I am to lay her carcass on the plain, that we may eat two pounds of it. This is how the weasel kills the rabbit; sucks an ounce of blood for his food, and wastes the rest. So the demoralised sheep-dog tears out the poor creature's kidneys, and wastes the rest. Man, armed by science with such powers of slaying, should be less egotistical than weasels and perverted sheep-dogs. I will not kill her. I will not lay that beautiful body of hers low, and glaze those tender, loving eyes that never gleamed with hate or rage at man, and fix those innocent jaws that never bit the life out of anything, not even of the grass she feeds on, and does it more good than harm. Feed on, poor innocent. And you be blanked; you and

your diamond, that I begin to wish I had never seen; for it would corrupt an angel."

Squat understood one word in ten, but he managed to reply. "This is nonsense-talk," said he, gravely. "The life is no bigger in that than in the murcat you shot last shoot."

"No more it is," said Staines. "I am a fool. It is come to this, then, Kafirs teach us theology, and Hottentots morality. I bow to my intellectual superior. I'll shoot the eland." He raised his rifle again.

"No, no, no, no, no, no," murmured the Hottentot, in a sweet voice scarcely audible, yet so keen in its entreaty, that Staines turned hastily round to look at him. His face was ashy, his teeth chattering, his limbs shaking. Before Staines could ask him what was the matter, he pointed through an aperture of the acacias into the wood hard by the elands. Staines looked, and saw what seemed to him like a very long dog, or some such animal, crawling from tree to tree. He did not at all share the

terror of his companion, nor understand it. But a terrible explanation followed. This creature, having got to the skirt of the wood, expanded, by some strange magic, to an incredible size, and sprang into the open, with a growl, a mighty lion; he seemed to ricochet from the ground, so immense was his second bound, that carried him to the eland, and he struck her one blow on the head with his terrible paw, and felled her as if with a thunderbolt: down went her body, with all the legs doubled, and her poor head turned over, and the nose kissed the ground. The lion stood motionless. Presently the eland, who was not dead, but stunned, began to recover and struggle feebly up. Then the lion sprang on her with a roar, and rolled her over, and, with two tremendous bites and a shake, tore her entrails out and laid her dying. He sat composedly down, and contemplated her last convulsions, without touching her again.

At his roar, though not loud, the horse, though he had never heard or seen a lion, trembled, and pulled at his halter.

Blacky crept into the water; and Staines was struck with such an awe as he had never felt. Nevertheless, the king of beasts being at a distance, and occupied, and Staines a brave man, and out of sight, he kept his ground and watched, and by those means saw a sight never to be forgotten. The lion rose up, and stood in the sun incredibly beautiful as well as terrible. His was not the mangy hue of the caged lion, but a skin tawny, golden, glossy as a racehorse, and of exquisite tint that shone like pure gold in the sun; his eye a lustrous jewel of richest hue, and his mane sublime. He looked towards the wood, and uttered a full roar. This was so tremendous, that the horse shook all over as if in an ague, and began to lather. Staines recoiled, and his flesh crept, and the Hottentot went under water, and did not emerge for ever so long.

After a pause, the lion roared again, and all the beasts and birds of prey seemed to know the meaning of that terrible roar. Till then the place had been a solitude, but now it began to fill in the strangest way, as if the lord of the forest could call all his subjects together with a trumpet roar: first came two lion cubs, to whom, in fact, the roar had been addressed. The lion rubbed himself several times against the eland, but did not eat a morsel, and the cubs went in and feasted on the prey. The lion politely and paternally drew back, and watched the young people enjoying themselves.

Meantime approached, on tiptoe, jackals and hyenas, but dared not come too near. Slate-coloured vultures settled at a little distance, but not a soul dared interfere with the cubs; they saw the lion was acting sentinel, and they knew better than come near.

After a time, papa feared for the digestion of those brats, or else his own mouth

watered; for he came up, knocked them head over heels with his velvet paw, and they took the gentle hint, and ran into the wood double quick.

Then the lion began tearing away at the eland, and bolting huge morsels greedily. This made the rabble's mouth water. The hyenas, and jackals, and vultures formed a circle ludicrous to behold, and that circle kept narrowing as the lion tore away at his prey. They increased in numbers, and at last hunger overcame prudence; the rear rank shoved on the front, as amongst men, and a general attack seemed imminent.

Then the lion looked up at these invaders, uttered a reproachful growl, and went at them, patting them right and left, and knocking them over. He never touched a vulture, nor, indeed, did he kill an animal. He was a lion, and only killed to eat; yet he soon cleared the place, because he knocked over a few hyenas and jackals, and the rest, being active, tumbled over the

vultures before they could spread their heavy wings. After this warning, they made a respectful circle again, through which, in due course, the gorged lion stalked into the wood.

A savage's sentiments change quickly, and the Hottentot, fearing little from a full lion, was now giggling at Staines's side. Staines asked him which he thought was the lord of all creatures, a man or a lion.

"A lion," said Blacky, amazed at such a shallow question.

Staines now got up, and proposed to continue their journey. But Blacky was for waiting till the lion was gone to sleep after his meal.

While they discussed the question, the lion burst out of the wood within hearing of their voices, as his pricked-up ears showed, and made straight for them at a distance of scarcely thirty yards.

Now, the chances are, the lion knew nothing about them, and only came to drink

at the kloof, after his meal, and perhaps lie under the acacias: but who can think calmly, when his first lion bursts out on him a few paces off? Staines shouldered his rifle, took a hasty, flurried aim, and sent a bullet at him.

If he had missed him, perhaps the report might have turned the lion; but he wounded him, and not mortally. Instantly the enraged beast uttered a terrific roar, and came at him with his mane distended with rage, his eyes glaring, his mouth open, and his whole body dilated with fury.

At that terrible moment, Staines recovered his wits enough to see that what little chance he had was to fire into the destroyer, not at him. He kneeled, and levelled at the centre of the lion's chest, and not till he was within five yards did he fire. Through the smoke he saw the lion in the air above him, and rolled shrieking into the stream and crawled like a worm under the bank, by one motion, and there lay trembling.

A few seconds of sick stupor passed: all was silent. Had the lion lost him? Was it possible he might yet escape?

All was silent.

He listened, in agony, for the sniffing of the lion, puzzling him out by scent.

No: all was silent.

Staines looked round, and saw a woolly head, and two saucer eyes and open nostrils close by him. It was the Hottentot, more dead than alive.

Staines whispered him, "I think he is gone."

The Hottentot whispered, "Gone a little way to watch. He is wise as well as strong." With this he disappeared beneath the water.

Still no sound but the screaming of the vultures, and snarling of the hyenas and jackals over the eland.

"Take a look," said Staines.

"Yes," said Squat; "but not to-day. Wait here a day, or two. Den he forget and forgive."

Now, Staines having seen the lion lie down and watch the dying eland, was a great deal impressed by this; and, as he had now good hopes of saving his life, he would not throw away a chance. He kept his head just above water, and never moved.

In this freezing situation they remained.

Presently there was a rustling that made both crouch.

It was followed by a croaking noise.

Christopher made himself small.

The Hottentot, on the contrary, raised his head, and ventured a little way into the stream.

By these means he saw it was something very foul, but not terrible. It was a large vulture that had settled on the very top of the nearest acacia.

At this the Hottentot got bolder still, and, to the great surprise of Staines, began to crawl cautiously into some rushes, and through them up the bank.

The next moment he burst into a mixture

of yelling and chirping, and singing, and other sounds so manifestly jubilant, that the vulture flapped heavily away, and Staines emerged in turn, but very cautiously.

Could he believe his eyes? There lay the lion, dead as a stone, on his back, with his four legs in the air, like wooden legs, they were so very dead: and the valiant Squat, dancing about him, and on him, and over him.

Staines, unable to change his sentiments so quickly, eyed even the dead body of the royal beast with awe and wonder. What, had he already laid that terrible monarch low, and with a tube made in a London shop by men who never saw a lion spring, nor heard his awful roar shake the air? He stood with his heart still beating, and said not a word. The shallow Hottentot whipped out a large knife, and began to skin the king of beasts. Staines wondered he could so profane that masterpiece of nature. He felt more inclined to thank

God for so great a preservation, and then pass reverently on, and leave the dead king undesecrated.

He was roused from his solemn thoughts by the reflection, that there might be a lioness about, since there were cubs: he took a piece of paper, emptied his remaining powder into it, and proceeded to dry it in the sun. This was soon done, and then he loaded both barrels.

By this time the adroit Hottentot had flayed the carcass sufficiently to reveal the mortal injury. The projectile had entered the chest, and, slanting upwards, had burst among the vitals, reducing them to a gory pulp. The lion must have died in the air, when he bounded on receiving the fatal shot.

The Hottentot uttered a cry of admiration. "Not the lion king of all, nor even the white man," he said; "but Enfeel rifle!"

Staines's eyes glittered. "You shall have

it, and the horse, for your diamond," said he, eagerly.

The black seemed a little shaken; but did not reply. He got out of it by going on with his lion; and Staines eyed him, and was bitterly disappointed at not getting the diamond even on these terms. He began to feel he should never get it: they were near the high-road; he could not keep the Hottentot to himself much longer. He felt sick at heart. He had wild and wicked thoughts; half hoped the lioness would come and kill the Hottentot, and liberate the jewel that possessed his soul.

At last the skin was off, and the Hottentot said, "Me take this to my kraal, and dey all say, 'Squat a great shooter; kill um lion.'"

Then Staines saw another chance for him, and summoned all his address for a last effort. "No, Squat," said he, "that skin belongs to me. I shot the lion, with the only rifle that can kill a lion like a cat.

Yet you would not give me a diamond—a paltry stone for it. No, Squat, if you were to go into your village with that lion's skin, why the old men would bend their heads to you, and say, 'Great is Squat! He killed the lion, and wears his skin.' The young women would all fight which should be the wife of Squat. Squat would be king of the village."

Squat's eyes began to roll.

"And shall I give the skin, and the glory that is my due, to an ill-natured fellow, who refuses me his paltry diamond for a good horse—look at him—and for the rifle that kills lions like rabbits—behold it; and a hundred pounds in good gold and Dutch notes—see; and for the lion's skin, and glory, and honour, and a rich wife, and to be king of Africa? Never."

The Hottentot's hands and toes began to work convulsively. "Good master, Squat ask pardon. Squat was blind. Squat will give the diamond, the great diamond of

Africa, for the lion's skin, and the king rifle, and the little horse, and the gold, and Dutch notes every one of them. Dat make just two hundred pounds."

"More like four hundred," cried Staines, very loud. "And how do I know it is a diamond? These large stones are the most deceitful. Show it me this instant," said he, imperiously.

"Iss, master," said the crushed Hottentot, with the voice of a mouse, and put the stone into his hand with a child-like faith that almost melted Staines; but he saw he must be firm. "Where did you find it?" he bawled.

"Master," said poor Squat, in deprecating tones, "my little master at the farm wanted plaster. He send to Bulteel's pan; dere was large lumps. Squat say to miners, 'May we take de large lumps?' Dey say, 'Yes; take de cursed lumps we no can break.' We took de cursed lumps. We ride 'em in de cart to farm twenty milses.

I beat 'em with my hammer. Dey is very hard. More dey break my heart dan I break their cursed heads. One day I use strong words, like white man, and I hit one large lump too hard; he break, and out come de white clear stone. Iss, him diamond. Long time we know him in our kraal, because he hard. Long time before ever white man know him, tousand years ago, we find him and he make us lilly hole in big stone for make wheat dust. Him a diamond, blank my eyes!"

This was intended as a solemn form of asseveration adapted to the white man's habits.

Yes, reader, he told the truth; and, strange to say, the miners knew the largest stones were in these great lumps of carbonate, but then the lumps were so cruelly hard, they lost all patience with them, and so, finding it was no use to break some of them, and not all, they rejected them all, with curses; and thus this great stone was

carted away as rubbish from the mine, and found, like a toad in a hole, by Squat.

"Well," said Christopher, "after all, you are an honest fellow, and I think I will buy it; but first you must show me out of this wood; I am not going to be eaten alive in it for want of the king of rifles."

Squat assented eagerly, and they started at once. They passed the skeleton of the eland; its very bones were polished, and its head carried into the wood; and, looking back, they saw vultures busy on the lion. They soon cleared the wood.

Squat handed Staines the diamond—when it touched his hand, as his own, a bolt of ice seemed to run down his back, and hot water to follow it—and the money, horse, rifle, and skin were made over to Squat.

"Shake hands over it, Squat," said Staines; "you are hard, but you are honest."

"Iss, master, I a good much hard and honest," said Squat.

"Good-bye, old fellow."

"Good-bye, master."

And Squat strutted away, with the halter in his hand, horse following him, rifle under his arm, and the lion's skin over his shoulders, and the tail trailing, a figure sublime in his own eyes, ridiculous in creation's. So vanity triumphed, even in the wilds of Africa.

Staines hurried forward on foot, loading his revolver as he went, for the very vicinity of the wood alarmed him now that he had parted with his trusty rifle.

That night he lay down on the open veldt, in his jackal's skin, with no weapon but his revolver, and woke with a start a dozen times. Just before daybreak he scanned the stars carefully, and, noting exactly where the sun rose, made a rough guess at his course, and followed it till the sun was too hot; then he crept under a ragged bush, hung up his jackal's skin, and sweated there, parched with thirst, and

gnawed with hunger. When it was cooler, he crept on, and found water, but no food. He was in torture, and began to be frightened, for he was in a desert. He found an ostrich egg and ate it ravenously.

Next day, hunger took a new form, faintness. He could not walk for it; his jackal's skin oppressed him; he lay down exhausted. A horror seized his dejected soul. The diamond! It would be his death. No man must so long for any earthly thing as he had for this glittering traitor. "Oh! my good horse! my trusty rifle!" he cried. "For what have I thrown you away? For starvation. Misers have been found stretched over their gold; and some day my skeleton will be found, and nothing to tell the base death I died of and deserved; nothing but the cursed diamond. Ay, fiend, glare in my eyes, do!" He felt delirium creeping over him; and, at that, a new terror froze him. His reason, that he had lost once, was he to lose it again? He

prayed; he wept; he dozed, and forgot all. When he woke again, a cool air was fanning his cheeks; it revived him a little; it became almost a breeze.

And this breeze, as it happened, carried on its wings the curse of Africa. There loomed in the north-west a cloud of singular density, that seemed to expand in size as it drew nearer, yet to be still more solid, and darken the air. It seemed a dust-storm. Staines took out his handkerchief, prepared to wrap his face in it, not to be stifled.

But soon there was a whirring and a whizzing, and hundreds of locusts flew over his head; they were followed by thousands, the swiftest of the mighty host. They thickened and thickened, till the air looked solid, and even that glaring sun was blackened by the rushing mass. Birds of all sorts whirled above, and swooped among them. They peppered Staines all over like shot. They stuck in his beard, and all over him; they clogged the bushes, carpeted the

ground, while the darkened air sang as with the whirl of machinery. Every bird in the air, and beast of the field, granivorous or carnivorous, was gorged with them, and to these animals was added man, for Staines, being famished, and remembering the vrow Bulteel, lighted a fire, and roasted a handful or two on a flat stone; they were delicious. The fire once lighted, they cooked themselves, for they kept flying into it. Three hours, without interruption, did they darken nature, and, before the column ceased, all the beast of the field came after, gorging them so recklessly, that Staines could have shot an antelope dead with his pistol within a yard of him.

But, to tell the horrible truth, the cooked locusts were so nice that he preferred to gorge on them along with the other animals.

He roasted another lot, for future use, and marched on with a good heart.

But now he got on some rough, scrubby

ground, and damaged his shoes, and tore his trousers.

This lasted a terrible distance; but at the end of it came the usual arid ground; and at last he came upon the track of wheels and hoofs. He struck it at an acute angle, and that showed him he had made a good line. He limped along it a little way, slowly, being footsore.

By-and-by, looking back, he saw a lot of rough fellows swaggering along behind him. Then he was alarmed, terribly alarmed, for his diamond; he tore a strip off his handkerchief, and tied the stone cunningly under his armpit as he hobbled on.

The men came up with him.

"Hallo, mate! Come from the diggings?"

"Yes."

"What luck?"

"Very good."

"Haw! haw! What, found a fifty carat? Show it us."

"We found five big stones, my mate and me. He is gone to Cape Town to sell them. I had no luck when he had left me, so I have cut it; going to turn farmer. Can you tell me how far it is to Dale's Kloof?"

No, they could not tell him that. They swung on; and, to Staines, their backs were a cordial, as we say in Scotland.

However, his travels were near an end. Next morning he saw Dale's Kloof in the distance; and as soon as the heat moderated, he pushed on, with one shoe and tattered trousers; and half an hour before sunset he hobbled up to the place.

It was all bustle. Travellers at the door; their waggons and carts under a long shed.

Ucatella was the first to see him coming, and came and fawned on him with delight. Her eyes glistened, her teeth gleamed. She patted both his cheeks, and then his shoulders, and even his knees, and then flew indoors crying, "My doctor child is

come home!" This amused three travellers, and brought out Dick, with a hearty welcome.

"But Lordsake, sir, why have you come afoot; and a rough road too? Look at your shoes. Hallo! What is come of the horse?"

"I exchanged him for a diamond."

"The deuce you did! And the rifle?"

"Exchanged that for the same diamond."

"It ought to be a big 'un."

"It is."

Dick made a wry face. "Well, sir, you know best. You are welcome, on horse or afoot. You are just in time; Phœbe and me are just sitting down to dinner."

He took him into a little room they had built for their own privacy, for they liked to be quiet now and then, being country bred; and Phœbe was putting their dinner on the table, when Staines limped in.

She gave a joyful cry, and turned red all over. "Oh, Doctor!" Then his travel-

torn appearance struck her. "But, dear heart! what a figure! Where's Reginald? Oh, he's not far off *I* know."

And she flung open the window, and almost flew through it in a moment, to look for her husband.

"Reginald?" said Staines. Then turning to Dick Dale, "Why, he is here—isn't he?"

"No, sir: not without he is just come with you."

"With me?—no. You know, we parted at the diggings. Come, Mr. Dale, he may not be here now; but he has been here. He must have been here."

Phœbe, who had not lost a word, turned round, with all her high colour gone, and her cheeks getting paler and paler. "Oh, Dick! what is this?"

"I don't understand it," said Dick. "Whatever made you think he was here, sir?"

"Why I tell you he left me to come here."

"Left you, sir!" faltered Phœbe. "Why, when?—where?"

"At the diggings—ever so long ago."

"Blank him! that is just like him; the uneasy fool!" roared Dick.

"No, Mr. Dale, you should not say that; he left me, with my consent, to come to Mrs. Falcon here, and consult her about disposing of our diamonds."

"Diamonds!—diamonds!" cried Phœbe. "Oh, they make me tremble. How *could* you let him go alone! You didn't let *him* go on foot, I hope?"

"Oh no, Mrs. Falcon; he had his horse, and his rifle, and money to spend on the road."

"How long ago did he leave you, sir?"

"I—I am sorry to say it was five weeks ago."

"Five weeks! and not come yet. Ah! the wild beasts!—the diggers!—the murderers! He is dead!"

"God forbid!" faltered Stainès; but his own blood began to run cold.

"He is dead. He has died between this and the dreadful diamonds. I shall never see my darling again: he is dead. He is dead."

She rushed out of the room, and out of the house, throwing her arms above her head in despair, and uttering those words of agony again and again in every variety of anguish.

At such horrible moments women always swoon—if we are to believe the dramatists. I doubt if there is one grain of truth in this. Women seldom swoon at all, unless their bodies are unhealthy, or weakened by the reaction that follows so terrible a shock as this. At all events, Phœbe, at first, was strong and wild as a lion, and went to and fro outside the house, unconscious of her body's motion, frenzied with agony, and but one word on her lips, "He is dead!—he is dead!"

Dick followed her, crying like a child, but master of himself; he got his people about her, and half carried her in again; then shut the door in all their faces.

He got the poor creature to sit down, and she began to rock and moan, with her apron over her head, and her brown hair loose about her.

"Why should he be dead?" said Dick. "Don't give a man up like that, Phœbe. Doctor, tell us more about it. Oh, man, how could you let him out of your sight? You knew how fond the poor creature was of him."

"But that was it, Mr. Dale," said Staines. "I knew his wife must pine for him; and we had found six large diamonds, and a handful of small ones; but the market was glutted; and, to get a better price, he wanted to go straight to Cape Town. But I said, 'No; go and show them to your wife, and see whether she will go to Cape Town.'"

Phœbe began to listen, as was evident by her moaning more softly.

"Might he not have gone straight to Cape Town?" Staines hazarded this timidly.

"Why should he do that, sir? Dale's Kloof is on the road."

"Only on one road. Mr. Dale, he was well armed, with rifle and revolver; and I cautioned him not to show a diamond on the road. Who would molest him? Diamonds don't show, like gold. Who was to know he had three thousand pounds hidden under his armpits, and in two barrels of his revolver?"

"Three thousand pounds!" cried Dale. "You trusted *him* with three thousand pounds?"

"Certainly. They were worth about three thousand pounds in Cape Town, and half as much again in——"

"Phœbe started up in a moment. "Thank God!" she cried. "There's hope for me. Oh, Dick, he is not dead: HE HAS ONLY DESERTED ME."

And, with these strange and pitiable words, she fell to sobbing, as if her great heart would burst at last.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THERE came a reaction, and Phœbe was prostrated with grief and alarm. Her brother never doubted now that Reginald had run to Cape Town for a lark. But Phœbe, though she thought so to, could not be sure; and so the double agony of bereavement and desertion tortured her by turns, and almost together. For the first time these many years, she was so crushed she could not go about her business, but lay on a little sofa in her own room, and had the blinds down, for her head ached so she could not bear the light.

She conceived a bitter resentment against Staines; and told Dick never to let him into her sight, if he did not want to be her death.

In vain Dick made excuses for him: she would hear none. For once she was as unreasonable as any other living woman: she could see nothing but that she had been happy, after years of misery, and should be happy now, if this man had never entered her house. "Ah, Colly!" she cried, "you were wiser than I was. You as good as told me he would make me smart, for lodging and curing him. And I was *so* happy!"

Dale communicated this as delicately as he could to Staines. Christopher was deeply grieved and wounded. He thought it unjust, but he knew it was natural: he said, humbly, "I feel guilty myself, Mr. Dale; and yet, unless I had possessed omniscience, what could I do? I thought of her in all—poor thing! poor thing!"

The tears were in his eyes, and Dick Dale went away scratching his head and thinking it over. The more he thought, the less he was inclined to condemn him.

Staines himself was much troubled in

mind, and lived on thorns. He wanted to be off to England, grudged every day, every hour, he spent in Africa. But Mrs. Falcon was his benefactress; he had been, for months and months, garnering up a heap of gratitude towards her. He had not the heart to leave her bad friends, and in misery. He kept hoping Falcon would return, or write.

Two days after his return, he was seated, disconsolate, glueing garnets and carbuncles on to a broad tapering bit of lamb-skin, when Ucatella came to him and said, "My doctor child sick?"

"No, not sick: but miserable." And he explained to her, as well as he could, what had passed. "But," said he, "I would not mind the loss of the diamonds now, if I was only sure he was alive. I think most of poor, poor Mrs. Falcon."

While Ucatella pondered this, but with one eye of demure curiosity on the coronet he was making, he told her it was for her—

he had not forgot her at the mines. "These stones," said he, "are not valued there; but see how glorious they are!"

In a few minutes he had finished the coronet, and gave it her. She uttered a chuckle of delight, and, with instinctive art, bound it, in a turn of her hand, about her brow; and then Staines himself was struck dumb with amazement. The carbuncles gathered from those mines look like rubies, so full of fire are they, and of enormous size. The chaplet had twelve great carbuncles in the centre, and went off by gradations into smaller garnets by the thousand. They flashed their blood-red flames in the African sun, and the head of Ucatella, grand before, became the head of the Sphinx, encircled with a coronet of fire. She bestowed a look of rapturous gratitude on Staines, and then glided away, like the stately Juno, to admire herself in the nearest glass like any other coquette, black, brown, yellow, copper, or white.

That very day, towards sunset, she burst upon Staines quite suddenly, with her coronet gleaming on her magnificent head, and her eyes like coals of fire, and under her magnificent arm, hard as a rock, a boy kicking and struggling in vain. She was furiously excited, and, for the first time, showed signs of the savage in the whites of her eyes, which seemed to turn the glorious pupils into semicircles. She clutched Staines by the shoulder with her left hand, and swept along with the pair, like dark Fate, or as potent justice sweeps away a pair of culprits, and carried them to the little window, and cried "Open—open!"

Dick Dale was at dinner. Phœbe lying down. Dick got up, rather crossly, and threw open the window. "What is up now?" said he crossly: he was like two or three more Englishmen—hated to be bothered at dinner-time.

"Dar," screamed Ucatella, setting down Tim, but holding him tight by the shoulder;

"now you tell what you see that night, you lilly Kafir trash; if you not tell, I kill you DEAD;" and she showed the whites of her eyes, like a wild beast.

Tim, thoroughly alarmed, quivered out that he had seen lilly master ride up to the gate one bright night, and look in, and Tim thought he was going in: but he changed his mind, and galloped away that way; and the monkey pointed south.

"And why couldn't you tell us this before?" questioned Dick.

"Me mind de sheep," said Tim, apologetically. "Me not mind de lilly master: jackals not eat him."

"You no more sense dan a sheep yourself," said Ucatella, loftily.

"No, no: God bless you both," cried poor Phœbe: "now I know the worst:" and a great burst of tears relieved her suffering heart.

Dick went out softly. When he got outside the door, he drew them all apart,

and said, "Yuke, you *are* a good-hearted girl. I'll never forget this while I live; and, Tim, there's a shilling for thee; but don't you go and spend it in Cape smoke; that is poison to whites, and destruction to blacks."

"No, master," said Tim. "I shall buy much bread, and make my tomach tiff;" then, with a glance of reproach at the domestic caterer, Ucatella, "I almost never have my tomach tiff."

Dick left his sister alone an hour or two, to have her cry out.

When he went back to her, there was a change: the brave woman no longer lay prostrate. She went about her business; only she was always either crying or drowning her tears.

He brought Dr. Staines in. Phœbe instantly turned her back on him with a shudder there was no mistaking.

"I had better go," said Staines. "Mrs. Falcon will never forgive me."

"She will have to quarrel with me else," said Dick, steadily. "Sit you down, Doctor. Honest folk like you and me and Phœbe wasn't made to quarrel for want of looking a thing all round. My sister, she hasn't looked it all round, and I have. Come, Pheeb, 'tis no use your blinding yourself. How was the poor Doctor to know your husband is a backguard?"

"He is not a blackguard. How dare you say that to my face?"

"He is a blackguard, and always was. And now he is a thief to boot. He has stolen those diamonds; you know that very well."

"Gently, Mr. Dale; you forget: they are as much his as mine."

"Well, and if half a sheep is mine, and I take the whole and sell him, and keep the money, what is that but stealing? Why, I wonder at you, Pheeb. You was always honest yourself, and yet you see the Doctor robbed by your man, and that does not

trouble you. What has he done to deserve it? He has been a good friend to us. He has put us on the road. We did little more than keep the pot boiling, before he came—well, yes, we stored grain; but whose advice has turned that grain to gold, I might say? Well, what's his offence? He trusted the diamonds to your man, and sent him to you. Is he the first honest man that has trusted a rogue? How was he to know? Likely he judged the husband by the wife. Answer me one thing, Pheeb. If he makes away with fifteen hundred pounds that is his, or partly yours—for he has eaten your bread ever since I knew him—and fifteen hundred more that is the Doctor's, where shall we find fifteen hundred pounds all in a moment, to pay the Doctor back his own?"

"My honest friend," said Staines, "you are tormenting yourself with shadows. I don't believe Mr. Falcon will wrong me of a shilling; and, if he does, I shall quietly

repay myself out of the big diamond. Yes, my dear friends, I did not throw away your horse, nor your rifle, nor your money: I gave them all, and the lion's skin—I gave them all—for this."

And he laid the big diamond on the table.

It was as big as a walnut, and of the purest water.

Dick Dale glanced at it stupidly. Phœbe turned her back on it, with a cry of horror, and then came slowly round by degrees; and her eyes were fascinated by the royal gem.

"Yes," said Staines, sadly, "I had to strip myself of all, to buy it, and, when I had got it, how proud I was, and how happy I thought we should all be over it for it is half yours, half mine. Yes, Mr. Dale, there lies six thousand pounds that belong to Mrs. Falcon."

"Six thousand pounds!" cried Dick.

"I'm sure of it. And so, if your sus-

picions are correct, and poor Falcon should yield to a sudden temptation, and spend all that money, I shall just coolly deduct it from your share of this wonderful stone: so make your mind easy. But no: if Falcon is really so wicked as to desert his happy home, and so mad as to spend thousands in a month or two, let us go and save him."

"That is my business," said Phœbe. "I am going in the mail-cart to-morrow."

"Well, you won't go alone," said Dick.

"Mrs. Falcon," said Staines, imploringly, "let me go with you."

"Thank you, sir. My brother can take care of me."

"Me! You had better not take me. If I catch hold of him, by —— I'll break his neck, or his back, or his leg, or something: he'll never run away from you again, if I lay hands on him," replied Dick.

"I'll go alone. You are both against me."

"No, Mrs. Falcon. I am not," said Staines. "My heart bleeds for you."

"Don't you demean yourself, praying her," said Dick. "It's a public conveyance: you have no need to ask *her* leave."

"That is true: I can't hinder folk from going to Cape Town the same day," said Phœbe, sullenly.

"If I might presume to advise, I would take little Tommy."

"What! all that road: do you want me to lose my child, as well as my man?"

"Oh! Mrs. Falcon!"

"Don't speak to her, Doctor, to get your nose snapped off: give her time. She'll come to her senses before she dies."

Next day Mrs. Falcon and Staines started for Cape Town. Staines paid her every attention, when opportunity offered. But she was sullen, and gloomy, and held no converse with him.

He landed her at an inn: and then told

her he would go at once to the jeweller's. He asked her piteously would she lend him a pound or two to prosecute his researches. She took out her purse, without a word, and lent him two pounds.

He began to scour the town: the jewellers he visited could tell him nothing. At last he came to a shop, and there he found Mrs. Falcon making her inquiries independently. She said, coldly, "You had better come with me, and get your money and things."

She took him to the bank—it happened to be the one she did business with—and said, "This is Doctor Christie come for his money and jewels."

There was some demur at this: but the cashier recognized him, and Phœbe, making herself responsible, the money and jewels were handed over.

Staines whispered Phœbe, "Are you sure the jewels are mine?"

"They were found on you, sir."

Staines took them, looking confused.

He did not know what to think. When they got into the street again he told her it was very kind of her to think of his interest at all.

No answer: she was not going to make friends with him over such a trifle as that.

By degrees, however, Cristopher's zeal on her behalf broke the ice; and besides, as the search proved unavailing, she needed sympathy; and he gave it her, and did not abuse her husband, as Dick Dale did.

One day, in the street, after a long thought, she said to him, "Didn't you say, sir, you gave him a letter for me?"

"I gave him two letters; one of them was to you."

"Could you remember what you said in it?"

"Perfectly. I begged you, if you should go to England, to break the truth to my wife. She is very excitable; and sudden joy has killed ere now. I gave you particular instructions."

"And you were very wise. But whatever could make you think I would go to England?"

"He told me you only wanted an excuse."

"Oh!!"

"When he told me that, I caught at it, of course. It was all the world to me to get my Rosa told by such a kind, good, sensible friend as you: and, Mrs. Falcon, I had no scruple about troubling you; because I knew the stones would sell for at least a thousand pounds more in England than here, and that would pay your expenses."

"I see, sir: I see. 'Twas very natural: you love your wife."

"Better than my life."

"And he told you I only wanted an excuse to go to England?"

"He did indeed. It was not true?"

"It was anything but true. I had suffered so in England: I had been so happy here: too happy to last. Ah! well,

it is all over. Let us think of the matter in hand. Sure that was not the only letter you gave my husband? Didn't you write to *her?*"

"Of course I did; but that was enclosed to you, and not to be given to her until you had broken the joyful news to her. Yes, Mrs. Falcon, I wrote and told her everything: my loss at sea: how I was saved, after, by your kindness. Our journeys—from Cape Town—and then to the diggings, my sudden good fortune—my hopes—my joy—oh, my poor Rosa: and now I suppose she will never get it. It is too cruel of him. I shall go home by the next steamer. I *can't* stay here any longer, for you or anybody. Oh, and I enclosed my ruby ring, that she gave me, for I thought she might not believe you without that."

"Let me think," said Phœbe, turning ashy pale. "For mercy's sake, let me think."

"He has read both those letters, sir."

"She will never see hers: any more than I shall see mine."

She paused again, thinking harder and harder.

"We must take two places in the next mail steamer. I must look after my husband; AND YOU AFTER YOUR WIFE."

CHAPTER XXV.

Mrs. Falcon's bitter feeling against Dr. Staines did not subside; it merely went out of sight a little. They were thrown together by potent circumstances, and, in a manner, connected by mutual obligations; so an open rupture seemed too unnatural. Still Phœbe was a woman, and, blinded by her love for her husband, could not forgive the innocent cause of their present unhappy separation; though the fault lay entirely with Falcon.

Staines took her on board the steamer, and paid her every attention. She was also civil to him; but it was a cold and constrained civility.

About a hundred miles from land the steamer stopped, and the passengers soon

learned there was something wrong with her machinery. In fact, after due consultation, the captain decided to put back.

This irritated and distressed Mrs. Falcon so, that the captain, desirous to oblige her, hailed a fast schooner, that tacked across her bows, and gave Mrs. Falcon the option of going back with him, or going on in the schooner, with whose skipper he was acquainted.

Staines advised her on no account to trust to sails, when she could have steam with only a delay of four or five days: but she said, "Anything sooner than go back. I can't, I can't, on such an errand."

Accordingly she was put on board the schooner, and Staines, after some hesitation, felt bound to accompany her.

It proved a sad error. Contrary winds assailed them the very next day, and with such severity that they had repeatedly to lie to.

On one of these occasions, with a ship

reeling under them like a restive horse, and the waves running mountains high, poor Phœbe's terrors overmastered both her hostility and her reserve. "Doctor," said she, "I believe 'tis God's will we shall never see England. I must try and die more like a Christian than I have lived, forgiving all who have wronged me, and you, that have been my good friend and my worst enemy, but you did not mean it. Sir, what has turned me against you so—your wife was my husband's sweetheart before he married me."

"My wife your husband's — you are dreaming."

"Nay, sir, once she came to my shop, and I saw directly I was nothing to him, and he owned it all to me; he had courted her, and she jilted him; so he said. Why should he tell me a lie about that? I'd lay my life 'tis true. And now you have sent him to her your own self; and, at sight of her, I shall be nothing again. Well, when this

ship goes down, they can marry, and I hope he will be happy, happier than I can make him, that tried my best, God knows."

This conversation surprised Staines not a little. However he said, with great warmth, it was false. His wife had danced and flirted with some young gentleman at one time, when there was a brief misunderstanding between him and her, but sweetheart she had never had, except him. He courted her fresh from school. "Now, my good soul," said he, "make your mind easy; the ship is a good one, and well handled, and in no danger whatever: and my wife is in no danger from your husband. Since you and your brother tell me that he is a villain, I am bound to believe you. But my wife is an angel. In our miserable hour of parting, she vowed not to marry again, should I be taken from her. Marry again! what am I talking of? Why, if he visits her at all, it will be to let her know I am alive, and give her my letter. Do you mean to tell me she

will listen to vows of love from him, when her whole heart is in rapture for me? Such nonsense!"

This burst of his did not affront her, and did not comfort her.

At last the wind abated; and, after a wearisome calm, a light breeze came, and the schooner crept homeward.

Phœbe restrained herself for several days; but at last she came back to the subject; this time it was in an apologetic tone at starting. "I know you think me a foolish woman," she said; "but my poor Reginald could never resist a pretty face; and she is so lovely: and you should have seen how he turned when she came in to my place. Oh, sir, there has been more between them than you know of; and, when I think that he will have been in England so many months before we get there, oh, Doctor, sometimes I feel as I should go mad: my head it is like a furnace, and see, my brow is all wrinkled again."

Then Staines tried to comfort her; assured her she was tormenting herself idly: her husband would perhaps have spent some of the diamond money on his amusement; but what if he had, he should deduct it out of the big diamond, which was also their joint property, and the loss would hardly be felt. "As to my wife, madam, I have but one anxiety; lest he should go blurting it out that I am alive, and almost kill her with joy."

"He will not do that, sir. He is no fool."

"I am glad of it; for there is nothing else to fear."

"Man, I tell you there is everything to fear. You don't know him as I do; nor his power over women."

"Mrs. Falcon, are you bent on affronting me?"

"No, sir; heaven forbid."

"Then please to close this subject for ever. In three weeks we shall be in England."

"Ay; but he has been there six months."

He bowed stiffly to her, went to his cabin, and avoided the poor foolish woman as much as he could without seeming too unkind.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Mrs. Staines made one or two movements—to stop Lord Tadcaster—with her hand, that expressive feature with which, at such times, a sensitive woman can do all but speak.

When, at last, he paused for her reply, she said, "Me marry again! Oh, for shame!"

"Mrs. Staines—Rosa—you will marry again, some day."

"Never. Me take another husband, after such a man as I have lost! I should be a monster. Oh, Lord Tadcaster, you have been so kind to me; so sympathising. You made me believe you loved my Christopher too; and now you have spoiled all. It is too cruel."

"Oh, Mrs. Staines, do you think me capable of feigning—don't you see my love for you has taken you by surprise? But how could I visit you—look on you—hear you—mingle my regrets with yours: yours were the deepest, of course; but mine were honest."

"I believe it." And she gave him her hand. He held it, and kissed it, and cried over it, as the young will, and implored her, on his knees, not to condemn herself to life-long widowhood, and him to despair.

Then she cried too; but she was firm; and by degrees, she made him see that her heart was inaccessible.

Then, at last, he submitted with tearful eyes, but a valiant heart.

She offered friendship, timidly.

But he was too much of a man to fall into that trap. "No," he said; "I could not, I could not. Love or nothing."

"You are right," said she, pityingly. "Forgive me. In my selfishness and my

usual folly, I did not see this coming on, or I would have spared you this mortification."

"Never mind that," gulped the little earl. "I shall always be proud I knew you, and proud I loved you, and offered you my hand."

Then the magnanimous little fellow blessed her, and left her, and discontinued his visits.

Mr. Lusignan found her crying, and got the truth out of her. He was in despair. He remonstrated kindly, but firmly. Truth compels me to say that she politely ignored him. He observed that phenomenon, and said, "Very well then, I shall telegraph for Uncle Philip."

"Do," said the rebel. "He is always welcome."

Philip, telegraphed, came down that evening; likewise his little black bag. He found them in the drawing-room: Papa with the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Rosa seated, sewing, at a

lamp. She made little Christie's clothes herself; fancy that!

Having ascertained that the little boy was well, Philip adroitly hiding that he had come down torn with anxiety on that head, inquired, with a show of contemptuous indifference, whose cat was dead.

"Nobody's," said Lusignan, crossly. Then he turned and pointed the *Gazette* at his offspring. "Do you see that young lady, stitching there so demurely?"

Philip carefully wiped and then put on his spectacles.

"I see her," said he. "She does look a little too innocent. None of them are really so innocent as all that. Has she been swearing at the nurse, and boxing her ears?"

"Worse than that. She has been and refused the Earl of Tadcaster."

"Refused him—what—has that little monkey had the audacity?"

"The condescension, you mean. Yes."

"And she has refused him?"

"And twenty thousand a year."

"What immorality!"

"Worse. What absurdity!"

"How is it to be accounted for? Is it the old story? 'I could never love him.' No; that's inadequate; for they all love a title and twenty thousand a year."

Rosa sewed on all this time in demure and absolute silence.

"She ignores us," said Philip. "It is intolerable. She does not appreciate our politeness in talking *at* her. Let us arraign her before our sacred tribunal, and have her into court. Now, mistress, the Senate of Venice is assembled, and you must be pleased to tell us why you refused a title and twenty thousand a year, with a small but symmetrical earl tacked on."

Rosa laid down her work, and said quietly, "Uncle, almost the last words that passed between me and my Christopher, we promised each other solemnly never to marry

again till death should us part. You know how deep my sorrow has been that I can find so few wishes of my lost Christopher to obey. Well, to-day I have had an opportunity at last. I have obeyed my own lost one: it has cost me a tear or two; but, for all that, it has given me one little gleam of happiness. Ah, foolish woman, that obeys too late!"

And, with this, the tears began to run.

All this seemed a little too high-flown to Mr. Lusignan. "There," said he, "see on what a straw her mind turns. So, but for that, you would have done the right thing, and married the earl?"

"I dare say I should—at the time—to stop his crying."

And, with this listless remark, she quietly took up her sewing again.

The sagacious Philip looked at her gravely. He thought to himself how piteous it was to see so young and lovely a creature, that had given up all hope of

happiness for herself. These being his real thoughts, he expressed himself as follows: "We had better drop this subject, sir. This young lady will take us potent, grave, and reverend signors out of our depth, if we don't mind."

But the moment he got her alone he kissed her paternally, and said, "Rosa, it is not lost on me, your fidelity to the dead. As years roll on, and your deep wound first closes, then skins, then heals——"

"Ah, let me die first——"

"Time and nature will absolve you from that vow: but bless you for thinking this can never be. Rosa, your folly of this day has made you my heir: so never let money tempt you, for you have enough, and will have more than enough, when I go."

He was as good as his word; altered his will next day, and made Rosa his residuary legatee. When he had done this, foreseeing no fresh occasion for his services, he prepared for a long visit to Italy. He was

packing up his things to go there, when he received a line from Lady Cicely Treherne, asking him to call on her professionally. As the lady's servant brought it, he sent back a line to say he no longer practised medicine, but would call on her as a friend in an hour's time.

He found her reclining, the picture of lassitude. "How good of you to come," she drawled.

"What's the matter?" said he brusquely.

"I wish to cawnsult you about myself. I think if anybody can brighten me up, it is you. I feel such a languaw—such a want of spirit; and I get palua, and that is not desiwable."

He examined her tongue and the white of her eye, and told her, in his blunt way, she ate and drank too much.

"Excuse me, sir," said she, stiffly.

"I mean too often. Now, let's see. Cup of tea in bed, of a morning?"

"Yaas."

"Dinner at two?"

"We call it luncheon."

"Are you a ventriloquist?"

"No."

"Then it is only your lips call it luncheon. Your poor stomach, could it speak, would call it dinner. Afternoon tea?"

"Yaas."

"At 7·30 another dinner. Tea after that. Your afflicted stomach gets no rest. You eat pastry?"

"I confess it."

"And sugar in a dozen forms?"

She nodded.

"Well, sugar is poison to your temperament. Now I'll set you up, if you can obey. Give up your morning dram."

"What dwam?"

"Tea in bed, before eating. Can't you see that is a dram? Animal food twice a day. No wine but a little claret and water; no pastry, no sweets, and play battledore with one of your male subjects."

"Battledaw! won't a lady do for that?"

"No: you would get talking, and not play *ad sudorem*."

"Ad sudawem! what is that?"

"In earnest."

"And will sudawem and the west put me in better spiwits, and give me a tinge?"

"It will incarnadine the lily, and make you the happiest young lady in England, as you are the best."

"I should like to be much happier than I am good, if we could manage it among us."

"We will manage it *among* us; for if the diet allowed should not make you boisterously gay, I have a remedy behind, suited to your temperament. I am old-fashioned, and believe in the temperaments."

"And what is that wemedy?"

"Try diet, and hard exercise, first."

"Oh yes: but let me know that wemedy."

"I warn you it is what we call in medicine an heroic one."

"Never mind. I am despewate."

"Well, then, the heroic remedy—to be used only as a desperate resort, mind—you must marry an Irishman."

This took the lady's breath away.

"Mawwy a nice man?"

"A nice man; no. That means a fool. Marry scientifically—a precaution eternally neglected. Marry a Hibernian gentleman, a being as mercurial as you are lymphatic."

"Mercurial!—lymphatic!——"

"Oh, hard words break no bones, ma'am."

"No, sir. And it is very curious. No, I won't tell you. Yes, I will. Hem!—I think I have noticed one."

"One what?"

"One Iwishman—dangling after me."

"Then your ladyship has only to tighten the cord—and *he's* done for."

Having administered this prescription, our laughing philosopher went off to Italy, and there fell in with some countrymen to

his mind, so he accompanied them to Egypt and Palestine.

His absence, and Lord Tadcaster's, made Rosa Staines's life extremely monotonous. Day followed day, and week followed week, each so unvarying, that, on a retrospect, three months seemed like one day.

And I think, at last, youth and nature began to rebel, and secretly to crave some little change or incident to ruffle the stagnant pool. Yet she would not go into society, and would only receive two or three dull people at the villa: so she made the very monotony which was beginning to tire her, and nursed a sacred grief she had no need to nurse, it was so truly genuine.

She was in this forlorn condition, when, one morning, a carriage drove to the door, and a card was brought up to her—"Mr. Reginald Falcon."

Falcon's history, between this and our last advices, is soon disposed of.

When, after a little struggle with his better angel, he rode past his wife's gate, he intended, at first, only to go to Cape Town, sell the diamonds, have a lark, and bring home the balance: but, as he rode south, his views expanded. He could have ten times the fun in London, and cheaper; since he could sell the diamonds for more money, and also conceal the true price. This was the Bohemian's whole mind in the business. He had no designs whatever on Mrs. Staines, nor did he intend to steal the diamonds, but to embezzle a portion of the purchase-money, and enjoy the pleasures and vices of the capital for a few months; then back to his milch cow, Phœbe, and lead a quiet life till the next uncontrollable fit should come upon him along with the means of satisfying it.

On the way, he read Staines's letter to Mrs. Falcon, very carefully. He never broke the seal of the letter to Mrs. Staines. That was to be given her when he had

broken the good news to her; and this he determined to do with such skill, as should make Dr. Staines very unwilling to look suspiciously or ill-naturedly into money accounts.

He reached London; and, being a thorough egotist, attended first to his own interests; he never went near Mrs. Staines until he had visited every diamond merchant and dealer in the metropolis: he showed the small stones to them all; but he showed no more than one large stone to each.

At last he got an offer of £1,200 for the small stones, and the same for the large yellow stone, and £900 for the second largest stone. He took this £900, and instantly wrote to Phœbe, telling her he had a sudden inspiration to bring the diamonds to England, which he could not regret, since he had never done a wiser thing. He had sold a single stone for £800, and had sent the Doctor's £400 to her

account in Cape Town; and, as each sale was effected, the half would be so remitted. She would see by that he was wiser than in former days. He should only stay so long as might be necessary to sell them all equally well. His own share he would apply to paying off mortgages on the family estate, of which he hoped some day to see her the mistress, or he would send it direct to her, whichever she might prefer.

Now the main object of this artful letter was to keep Phœbe quiet, and not have her coming after him, of which he felt she was very capable.

The money got safe to Cape Town, but the letter to Phœbe miscarried. How this happened was never positively known; but the servant of the lodging-house was afterwards detected cutting stamps off a letter; so perhaps she had played that game on this occasion.

By this means, matters took a curious turn. Falcon, intending to lull his wife

into a false security, lulled himself into that state instead.

When he had taken care of himself, and got £500 to play the fool with, then he condescended to remember his errand of mercy; and he came down to Gravesend, to see Mrs. Staines.

On the road, he gave his mind seriously to the delicate and dangerous task. It did not, however, disquiet him as it would you, sir, or you, madam. He had a great advantage over you. He was a liar—a smooth, ready, accomplished liar—and he knew it.

This was the outline he had traced in his mind; he should appear very subdued and sad; should wear an air of condolence. But, after a while, should say, "And yet men have been lost like that, and escaped. A man was picked up on a raft in those very latitudes, and brought into Cape Town. A friend of mine saw him, months after, at the hospital. His memory was shaken—

could not tell his name; but in other respects he was all right again."

If Mrs. Staines took fire at this, he would say his friend knew all the particulars, and he would ask him, and so leave that to rankle till next visit. And, having planted his germ of hope, he would grow it, and water it, by visits and correspondence, till he could throw off the mask, and say he was convinced Staines was alive: and from that, by other degrees, till he could say, on his wife's authority, that the man picked up at sea, and cured at her house, was the very physician who had saved her brother's life: and so on to the overwhelming proof he carried in the ruby ring and the letter.

I am afraid the cunning and dexterity, the subtlety and tact required, interested him more in the commission than did the benevolence.

He called, sent up his card, and composed his countenance for his part, like an actor at the Wing.

"Not at home."

He stared with amazement.

The history of a "Not at home" is not, in general, worth recording: but this is an exception.

On receiving Falcon's card, Mrs. Staines gave a little start, and coloured faintly. She instantly resolved not to see him. What! the man she had flirted with, almost jilted, and refused to marry—he dared to be alive when her Christopher was dead, and had come there to show her *he* was alive!

She said "Not at home" with a tone of unusual sharpness and decision, which left the servant in no doubt he must be equally decided at the hall door.

Falcon received the sudden freezer with amazement. "Nonsense," said he. "Not at home at this time of the morning—to an old friend!"

"Not at home!" said the man, doggedly.

"Oh, very well," said Falcon, with a bitter sneer, and returned to London.

He felt sure she was at home; and, being a tremendous egotist, he said, "Oh! all right. If she would rather not know her husband is alive, it is all one to me;" and he actually took no more notice of her for a full week, and never thought of her, except to chuckle over the penalty she was paying for daring to affront his vanity.

However, Sunday came; he saw a dull day before him, and so he relented, and thought he would give her another trial.

He went down to Gravesend by boat, and strolled towards the villa.

When he was about a hundred yards from the villa, a lady, all in black, came out with a nurse and child.

Falcon knew her figure all that way off, and it gave him a curious thrill that surprised him. He followed her, and was not very far behind her when she reached the church. She turned at the porch, kissed the child earnestly, and gave the nurse some directions; then entered the church.

"Come," said Falcon, "I'll have a look at her, any way."

He went into the church, and walked up a side aisle to a pillar, from which he thought he might be able to see the whole congregation; and, sure enough, there she sat, a few yards from him. She was lovelier than ever. Mind had grown on her face with trouble. An angelic expression illuminated her beauty; he gazed on her, fascinated. He drank and drank her beauty two mortal hours, and, when the church broke up, and she went home, he was half afraid to follow her, for he felt how hard it would be to say anything to her but that the old love had returned on him with double force.

However, having watched her home, he walked slowly to and fro composing himself for the interview.

He now determined to make the process of informing her a very long one: he would spin it out, and so secure many a sweet

interview with her: and, who knows, he might fascinate her as she had him, and ripen gratitude into love, as he understood that word.

He called, he sent in his card. The man went in, and came back with a sonorous "Not at home."

"Not at home? nonsense. Why she is just come in from church."

"Not at home," said the man, evidently strong in his instructions.

Falcon turned white with rage at this second affront. "All the worse for her," said he, and turned on his heel.

He went home, raging with disappointment and wounded vanity, and—since such love as his is seldom very far from hate—he swore she should never know from him that her husband was alive. He even moralised. "This comes of being so unselfish," said he. "I'll give that game up for ever."

By-and-by, a mere negative revenge was

not enough for him, and he set his wits to work to make her smart.

He wrote to her from his lodgings:—

"DEAR MADAM,

"What a pity you are never at home to me. I had something to say about your husband, that I thought might interest you.

"Yours truly,

"R. FALCON."

Imagine the effect of this abominable note. It was like a rock flung into a placid pool. It set Rosa trembling all over. What could he mean?

She ran with it to her father, and asked him what Mr. Falcon could mean.

"I have no idea," said he. "You had better ask him, not me."

"I am afraid it is only to get to see me. You know he admired me once. Ah, how suspicious I am getting."

Rosa wrote to Falcon :—

"DEAR SIR,

"Since my bereavement I see scarcely anybody. My servant did not know you; so I hope you will excuse me. If it is too much trouble to call again, would you kindly explain your note to me by letter.

"Yours respectfully,

"ROSA STAINES."

Falcon chuckled bitterly over this. "No, my lady," said he. "I'll serve you out. You shall run after me like a little dog. I have got the bone that will draw you."

He wrote back coldly to say that the matter he had wished to communicate was too delicate and important to put on paper; that he would try and get down to Gravesend again some day or other, but was much occupied, and had already put himself to inconvenience. He added, in a postscript,

that he was always at home from four to five.

Next day he got hold of the servant, and gave her minute instructions, and a guinea.

Then the wretch got some tools and bored a hole in the partition wall of his sitting-room. The paper had large flowers. He was artist enough to conceal the trick with water-colours. In his bed-room the hole came behind the curtains.

That very afternoon, as he had foreseen, Mrs. Staines called on him. The maid, duly instructed, said Mr. Falcon was out, but would soon return, and could she wait his return? The maid being so very civil, Mrs. Staines said she would wait a little while, and was immediately ushered into Falcon's sitting-room. There she sat down; but was evidently ill at ease, restless, flushed. She could not sit quiet, and at last began to walk up and down the room, almost wildly. Her beautiful eyes glittered, and the whole woman seemed on fire. The

caitiff, who was watching her, saw and gloated on all this, and enjoyed to the full her beauty and agitation, and his revenge for her "Not at homes."

But, after a long time, there was a reaction: she sat down and uttered some plaintive sounds inarticulate, or nearly; and at last she began to cry.

Then it cost Falcon an effort not to come in and comfort her; but he controlled himself and kept quiet.

She rang the bell. She asked for writing paper, and she wrote her unseen tormentor a humble note, begging him, for old acquaintance, to call on her, and tell her what his mysterious words meant that had filled her with agitation.

This done, she went away, with a deep sigh, and Falcon emerged, and pounced upon her letter.

He kissed it; he read it a dozen times: he sat down where she had sat, and his base passion overpowered him. Her beauty, her

agitation, her fear, her tears, all combined to madden him, and do the devil's work in his false, selfish heart, so open to violent passions, so dead to conscience.

For once in his life he was violently agitated, and torn by conflicting feelings: he walked about the room more wildly than his victim had; and if it be true that, in certain great temptations, good and bad angels fight for a man, here you might have seen as fierce a battle of that kind as ever was.

At last he rushed out into the air, and did not return till ten o'clock at night. He came back pale and haggard, and with a look of crime in his face.

True Bohemian as he was, he sent for a pint of brandy.

So then the die was cast, and something was to be done that called for brandy.

He bolted himself in, and drank a wine-glass of it neat; then another; then another.

Now his pale cheek is flushed, and his

eye glitters. Drink for ever! great Ruin of English souls, as well as bodies.

He put the poker in the fire and heated it red hot.

He brought Staines's letter, and softened the sealing-wax with the hot poker; then with his pen-knife made a neat incision in the wax, and opened the letter. He took out the ring, and put it carefully away. Then he lighted a cigar, and read the letter, and studied it. Many a man, capable of murder in heat of passion, could not have resisted the pathos of this letter. Many a Newgate thief, after reading it, would have felt such pity for the loving husband who had suffered to the verge of death, and then to the brink of madness, and for the poor bereaved wife, that he would have taken the letter down to Gravesend that very night, though he picked two fresh pockets to defray the expenses of the road.

But this was an egotist. Good-nature had curbed his egotism a little while; but

now vanity and passion had swept away all unselfish feelings, and the pure egotist alone remained.

Now, the pure egotist has been defined as a man who will burn down his *neighbour's* house to cook *himself* an egg. Murder is but Egotism carried out to its natural climax. What is murder to a pure egotist, especially a brandied one?

I knew an egotist, who met a female acquaintance in Newhaven village. She had a one-pound note, and offered to treat him. She changed this note to treat him. Fish she gave him, and much whisky. Cost her four shillings. He ate and drank with her, at her expense; and his aorta, or principal blood-vessel, being warmed with her whisky, he murdered her for the change, the odd sixteen shillings.

I had the pleasure of seeing that egotist hung, with these eyes. It was a slice of luck that, I grieve to say, has not occurred again to me.

So much for a whiskied egotist.

His less truculent, but equally remorseless, brother in villainy, the brandied egotist, Falcon, could read that poor husband's letter without blenching; the love and the anticipations of rapture, these made him writhe a little with jealousy, but they roused not a grain of pity. He was a true egotist, blind, remorseless.

In this, his true character, he studied the letter profoundly, and mastered all the facts, and digested them well.

All manner of diabolical artifices presented themselves to his brain, barren of true intellect, yet fertile in fraud; in that, and all low cunning and subtlety, far more than a match for Solomon or Bacon.

His sinister studies were pursued far into the night. Then he went to bed, and his unbounded egotism gave him the sleep a grander criminal would have courted in vain on the verge of a monstrous and deliberate crime.

Next day he went to a fashionable tailor, and ordered a complete suit of black. This was made in forty-eight hours; the interval was spent mainly in concocting lies to be incorporated with the number of minute facts he had gained from Staines's letter, and in making close imitations of his handwriting.

Thus armed, and crammed with more lies than the "Menteur" of Corneille, but not such innocent ones, he went down to Gravesend, all in deep mourning, with crape round his hat.

He presented himself at the villa.

The servant was all obsequiousness. Yes, Mrs. Staines received few visitors; but she was at home to *him*. He even began to falter excuses. "Nonsense," said Falcon, and slipped a sovereign into his hand; "you are a good servant, and obey orders."

The servant's respect doubled, and he ushered the visitor into the drawing-room,

as one whose name was a passport. "Mr. Reginald Falcon, madam."

Mrs. Staines was alone. She rose to meet him. Her colour came and went: her full eye fell on him, and took in all at a glance—that he was all in black, and that he had a beard, and looked pale, and ill at ease.

Little dreaming that this was the anxiety of a felon about to take the actual plunge into a novel crime, she was rather prepossessed by it. The beard gave him dignity, and hid his mean, cruel mouth. His black suit seemed to say he, too, had lost some one dear to him; and that was a ground of sympathy.

She received him kindly, and thanked him for taking the trouble to come again. She begged him to be seated; and then, woman-like, she waited for him to explain.

But he was in no hurry, and waited for her. He knew she would speak if he was silent.

She could not keep him waiting long. "Mr. Falcon," said she, hesitating a little, "you have something to say to me about him I have lost."

"Yes," said he, softly. "I have something I could say; and I think I ought to say it: but I am afraid; because I don't know what will be the result. I fear to make you more unhappy."

"Me! more unhappy? Me, whose dear husband lies at the bottom of the ocean. Other poor wounded creatures have the wretched comfort of knowing where he lies—of carrying flowers to his tomb. But I—oh, Mr. Falcon, I am bereaved of all: even his poor remains lost,—lost,"—she could say no more.

Then that craven heart began to quake at what he was doing; quaked, yet persevered; but his own voice quivered, and his cheek grew ashy pale. No wonder. If ever God condescended to pour lightning on a skunk, surely now was the time.

Shaking and sweating with terror at his own act, he stammered out, "Would it be the least comfort to you to know that you are not denied that poor consolation? Suppose he died not so miserably as you think? Suppose he was picked up at sea, in a dying state?"

"Ah!"

"Suppose he lingered, nursed by kind and sympathising hands, that almost saved him? Suppose he was laid in hallowed ground, and a great many tears shed over his grave?"

"Ah, that would indeed be a comfort. And it was to say this you came. I thank you. I bless you. But, my good, kind friend, you are deceived. You don't know my husband. You never saw him. He perished at sea."

"Will it be kind, or unkind, to tell you why I think he died as I tell you, and not at sea?"

"Kind, but impossible. You deceive

yourself. Ah, I see. You found some poor sufferer, and were good to him; but it was not my poor Christie. Oh, if it were, I should worship you. But I thank you, as it is. It was very kind to want to give me this little, little crumb of comfort; for I know I did not behave well to you, sir: but you are generous, and have forgiven a poor heart-broken creature, that never was very wise."

He gave her time to cry, and then said to her, "I only wanted to be sure it *would* be any comfort to you. Mrs. Staines, it is true I did not even know his name; nor yours. When I met, in this very room, the great disappointment that has saddened my own life, I left England directly. I collected funds, went to Natal, and turned landowner and farmer. I have made a large fortune, but I need not tell you I am not happy. Well, I had a yacht, and, sailing from Cape Town to Algoa Bay, I picked up a raft, with a dying man on it.

He was perishing of exhaustion and exposure. I got a little brandy between his lips, and kept him alive. I landed with him at once: and we nursed him on shore. We had to be very cautious. He improved. We got him to take egg-flip. He smiled on us at first, and then he thanked us. I nursed him day and night for ten days. He got much stronger. He spoke to me, thanked me again and again, and told me his name was Christopher Staines. He told me he should never get well. I implored him to have courage. He said he did not want for courage; but nature had been tried too hard. We got so fond of each other. Oh!"—and the caitiff pretended to break down; and his feigned grief mingled with Rosa's despairing sobs.

He made an apparent effort, and said, "He spoke to me of his wife, his darling Rosa. The name made me start, but I could not know it was you. At last he was strong enough to write a few lines, and he

made me promise to take them to his wife."

"Ah!" said Rosa. "Show them me."

"I will."

"This moment." And her hands began to work convulsively.

"I cannot," said Falcon. "I have not brought them with me."

Rosa cast a keen eye of suspicion and terror on him. His not bringing the letter seemed monstrous; and so, indeed, it was. The fact is, the letter was not written.

Falcon affected not to notice her keen look. He flowed on, "The address he put on that letter astonished me. 'Kent Villa.' Of course I knew Kent Villa: and he called you 'Rosa.'"

"How could you come to me without that letter?" cried Rosa, wringing her hands. "How am I to know? It is all so strange, so incredible."

"Don't you believe me?" said Falcon, sadly. "Why should I deceive you?

The first time I came down to tell you all this I did not *know* who Mrs. Staines was. I suspected; but no more. The second time, I saw you in the church, and then I knew; and followed you to try and tell you all this; and you were not at home to me."

"Forgive me," said Rosa, carelessly: then, earnestly, "The letter! when can I see it?"

"I will send, or bring it."

"Bring it! I am in agony till I see it. Oh, my darling! my darling! It can't be true. It was not my Christie. He lies in the depths of the ocean. Lord Tadcaster was in the ship, and he says so: everybody says so."

"And I say he sleeps in hallowed ground, and these hands laid him there."

Rosa lifted her hands to heaven, and cried, piteously, "I don't know what to think. You would not willingly deceive me. But how can this be? Oh, Uncle

Philip, why are you away from me? Sir, you say he gave you a letter?"

"Yes."

"Oh, why, why did you not bring it?"

"Because he told me the contents; and I thought he prized my poor efforts too highly. It did not occur to me you would doubt my word."

"Oh, no; no more I do: but I fear it was not my Christie."

"I'll go for the letter at once, Mrs. Staines."

"Oh, thank you! Bless you! Yes this minute!"

The artful rogue did not go; never intended.

He rose *to go;* but had a sudden inspiration; very sudden, of course. "Had he nothing about him you could recognise him by?"

"Yes, he had a ring I gave him."

Falcon took a black-edged envelope out of his pocket.

"A ruby ring," said she, beginning to tremble at his quiet action."

"Is that it?" and he handed her a ruby ring.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Mrs. Staines uttered a sharp cry, and seized the ring. Her eyes dilated over it, and she began to tremble in every limb; and at last she sank slowly back, and her head fell on one side like a broken lily. The sudden sight of the ring overpowered her almost to fainting.

Falcon rose to call for assistance; but she made him a feeble motion not to do so.

She got the better of her faintness, and then she fell to kissing the ring, in an agony of love, and wept over it, and still held it, and gazed at it through her blinding tears.

Falcon eyed her uneasily.

But he soon found he had nothing to

fear. For a long time she seemed scarcely aware of his presence; and, when she noticed him, it was to thank him, almost passionately.

"It was my Christie you were so good to: may heaven bless you for it: and you will bring me his letter, will you not?"

"Of course I will."

"Oh, do not go yet. It is all so strange: so sad. I seem to have lost my poor Christie again, since he did not die at sea. But no, I am ungrateful to God, and ungrateful to the kind friend that nursed him to the last. Ah, I envy you that. Tell me all. Never mind my crying. I have seen the time I could not cry. It was worse then than now. I shall always cry when I speak of him, ay, to my dying day. Tell me, tell me all."

Her passion frightened the egotist, but did not turn him. He had gone too far. He told her that, after raising all their hopes, Dr. Staines had suddenly changed

for the worse, and sunk rapidly; that his last words had been about her, and he had said, "My poor Rosa, who will protect her?" That, to comfort him, he had said he would protect her. Then the dying man had managed to write a line or two, and to address it. Almost his last words had been, "Be a father to my child."

"That is strange."

"You have no child? Then it must have been you he meant. He spoke of you as a child more than once."

"Mr. Falcon, I have a child; but born since I lost my poor child's father."

"Then I think he knew it. They say that dying men can see all over the world: and I remember, when he said it, his eyes seemed fixed very strangely, as if on something distant. Oh, how wonderful all this is. May I see his child, to whom I promised——"

The artist in lies left his sentence half completed.

Rosa rang, and sent for her little boy.

Mr. Falcon admired his beauty, and said, quietly, "I shall keep my vow."

He then left her, with a promise to come back early next morning with the letter.

She let him go only on those conditions.

As soon as her father came in, she ran to him with this strange story.

"I don't believe it," said he. "It is impossible."

She showed him the proof, the ruby ring.

Then he became very uneasy, and begged her not to tell a soul. He did not tell her the reason, but he feared the insurance office would hear of it, and require proofs of Christopher's decease, whereas they had accepted it without a murmur, on the evidence of Captain Hamilton and the *Amphitrite's* log-book.

As for Falcon, he went carefully through Staines's two letters, and wherever he found a word that suited his purpose, he traced it by the usual process, and so, in the course

of a few hours, he concocted a short letter, all the words in which, except three, were facsimiles, only here and there a little shaky; the three odd words he had to imitate by observation of the letters. The signature he got to perfection by tracing.

He inserted this letter in the original envelope, and sealed it very carefully, so as to hide that the seal had been tampered with.

Thus armed, he went down to Gravesend. There he hired a horse and rode to Kent Villa.

Why he hired a horse, he knew how hard it is to forge handwriting, and he chose to have the means of escape at hand.

He came into the drawing-room, ghastly pale, and almost immediately gave her the letter; then turned his back, feigning delicacy. In reality he was quaking with fear lest she should suspect the handwriting. But the envelope was addressed by Staines, and paved the way for the letter; she was unsuspicious and good, and her heart cried

out for her husband's last written words: at such a moment, what chance had judgment and suspicion in an innocent and loving soul?

Her eloquent sighs and sobs soon told the caitiff he had nothing to fear.

The letter ran thus:—

"MY OWN ROSA,

"All that a brother could do for a beloved brother Falcon has done. He nursed me night and day. But it is vain. I shall never see you again in this world. I send you a protector, and a father to your child. Value him. He has promised to be your stay on earth, and my spirit shall watch over you.

"To my last breath,

"Your loving husband,

"CHRISTOPHER STAINES."

Falcon rose, and began to steal on tiptoe out of the room.

Rosa stopped him. "You need not go," said she. "You are our friend. By-and-by I hope I shall find words to thank you."

"Pray let me retire a moment," said the hypocrite. "A husband's last words: too sacred—a stranger:" and he went out into the garden. There he found the nursemaid Emily, and the little boy.

He stopped the child, and made love to the nursemaid; showed her his diamonds—he carried them all about him—told her he had thirty thousand acres in Cape Colony, and diamonds on them; and was going to buy thirty thousand more of the government. "Here, take one," said he. "Oh, you needn't be shy. They are common enough on my estates. I'll tell you what, though, you could not buy that for less than thirty pounds at any shop in London. Could she, my little duck? Never mind, it is no brighter than her eyes. Now do you know what she will do with that,

Master Christie? She will give it to some duffer to put in a pin."

"She won't do nothing of the kind," said Emily, flushing all over. "She is not such a fool." She then volunteered to tell him she had no sweetheart, and did not trouble her head about young men at all. He interpreted this to mean she was looking out for one. So do I.

"No sweetheart!" said he; "and the prettiest girl I have seen since I landed: then I put in for the situation."

Here, seeing the footman coming, he bestowed a most paternal kiss on little Christie, and saying, "Not a word to John, or no more diamonds from me;" he moved carefully away, leaving the girl all in a flutter with extravagant hopes.

The next moment this wolf in the sheepfold entered the drawing-room. Mrs. Staines was not there. He waited, and waited, and began to get rather uneasy, as men will who walk among pitfalls.

Presently the footman came to say that Mrs. Staines was with her father, in his study, but she would come to him in five minutes.

This increased his anxiety. What! She was taking advice of an older head. He began to be very seriously alarmed, and indeed had pretty well made up his mind to go down and gallop off, when the door opened, and Rosa came hastily in. Her eyes were very red with weeping. She came to him with both hands extended to him; he gave her his, timidly. She pressed them with such earnestness and power as he could not have suspected; and thanked him, and blessed him, with such a torrent of eloquence, that he hung his head with shame; and being unable to face it out, villain as he was, yet still artful to the core, he pretended to burst out crying, and ran out of the room, and rode away.

He waited two days, and then called again. Rosa reproached him sweetly for going before she had half thanked him.

"All the better," said he. "I have been thanked a great deal too much already. Who would not do his best for a dying countryman, and fight night and day to save him for his wife and child at home? If I had succeeded, then I would be greedy of praise: but now it makes me blush; it makes me very sad."

"You did your best," said Rosa, tearfully.

"Ah! that I did. Indeed I was ill for weeks after, myself, through the strain upon my mind, and the disappointment, and going so many nights without sleep. But don't let us talk of that."

"Do you know what my darling says to me in my letter?"

"No."

"Would you like to see it?"

"Indeed I should: but I have no right."

"Every right. It is the only mark of esteem, worth anything, I can show you."

She handed him the letter, and buried her own face in her hands.

He read it, and acted the deepest emotion.

He handed it back, without a word.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

From this time Falcon was always welcome at Kent Villa. He fascinated everybody in the house. He renewed his acquaintance with Mr. Lusignan, and got asked to stay a week in the house. He showed Rosa and her father the diamonds, and, the truth must be owned, they made Rosa's eyes sparkle for the first time this eighteen months. He insinuated rather than declared his enormous wealth.

In reply to the old man's eager questions, as the large diamonds lay glittering on the table, and pointed every word, he said that a few of his Hottentots had found these for him; he had made them dig on a diamondiferous part of his estate, just by way of

testing the matter; and this was the result, this, and a much larger stone, for which he had received eight thousand pounds from Posno.

"If I was a young man," said Lusignan, "I would go out directly, and dig on your estate."

"I would not let you do anything so paltry," said "le Menteur." "Why, my dear sir, there are no fortunes to be made by grubbing for diamonds; the fortunes are made out of the diamonds, but not in that way. Now I have thirty thousand acres, and am just concluding a bargain for thirty thousand more, on which I happen to know there are diamonds in a sly corner. Well, of my thirty thousand tried acres, a hundred only are diamondiferous. But I have four thousand thirty-foot claims, leased at ten shillings per month. Count that up."

"Why, it is twenty-four thousand pounds a year."

"Excuse me: you must deduct a thousand

a year for the expenses of collection. But this is only one phase of the business. I have a large inn upon each of the three great routes from the diamonds to the coast; and these inns are supplied with the produce of my own farms. Mark the effect of the diamonds on property. My sixty thousand acres, which are not diamondiferous, will very soon be worth as much as sixty thousand English acres, say two pounds the acre, per annum. That is under the mark, because in Africa the land is not burdened with poor-rates, tithes, and all the other iniquities that crush the English landowner, as I know to my cost. But that is not all, sir. Would you believe it? even after the diamonds were declared, the people out there had so little foresight that they allowed me to buy land all round Port Elizabeth, Natal, and Cape Town, the three ports through which the world get at the diamonds, and the diamonds get at the world. I have got a girdle of land round those three

outlets, bought by the acre; in two years I shall sell it by the yard. Believe me, sir, English fortunes, even the largest, are mere child's play, compared with the colossal wealth a man can accumulate, if he looks beyond these great discoveries to their consequences, and lets others grub for him. But what is the use of it all to me?" said this Bohemian, with a sigh. "I have no taste for luxuries; no love of display. I have not even charity to dispense on a large scale; for there are no deserving poor out there; and the poverty that springs from vice, that I never will encourage."

John heard nearly all this, and took it into the kitchen; and henceforth Adoration was the only word for this prince of men, this rare combination of the Adonis and the Millionaire.

He seldom held such discourses before Rosa; but talked her father into an impression of his boundless wealth; and half reconciled him to Rosa's refusal of Lord

Tadcaster, since here was an old suitor, who, doubtless, with a little encouragement, would soon come on again.

Under this impression, Mr. Lusignan gave Falcon more than a little encouragement, and, as Rosa did not resist, he became a constant visitor at the villa, and was always there from Saturday to Monday.

He exerted all his art of pleasing, and he succeeded. He was welcome to Rosa, and she made no secret of it.

Emily threw herself in his way, and had many a sly talk with him, while he was pretending to be engaged with young Christie. He flattered her, and made her sweet on him, but was too much in love with Rosa, after his fashion, to flirt seriously with her. He thought he might want her services: so he worked upon her after this fashion; asked her if she would like to keep an inn.

"Wouldn't I just?" said she, frankly.

Then he told her that, if all went to his

wish in England, she should be landlady of one of his inns in the Cape Colony. "And you will get a good husband out there directly," said he. "Beauty is a very uncommon thing in those parts. But I shall ask you to marry somebody who can help you in the business—or not to marry at all."

"I wish I had the inn," said Emily. "Husbands are soon got when a girl hasn't her face only to look to."

"Well, I promise you the inn," said he, "and a good outfit of clothes, and money in both pockets, if you will do me a good turn here in England."

"That I would, sir. But laws, what can a poor girl like me do for a rich gentleman like you?"

"Can you keep a secret, Emily?"

"Nobody better. You try me, sir."

He looked at her well; saw she was one of those who could keep a secret, if she chose, and he resolved to risk it.

"Emily, my girl," said he, sadly, "I am an unhappy man."

"You, sir! Why you didn't ought to be."

"I am then. I am in love; and cannot win her."

Then he told the girl a pretty tender tale, that he had loved Mrs. Staines when she was Miss Lusignan, had thought himself beloved in turn, but was rejected; and now, though she was a widow, he had not the courage to court her, her heart was in the grave. He spoke in such a broken voice that the girl's good-nature fought against her little pique at finding how little he was smitten with *her*, and Falcon soon found means to array her cupidity on the side of her good-nature. He gave her a five-pound note to buy gloves, and promised her a fortune, and she undertook to be secret as the grave, and say certain things adroitly to Mrs. Staines.

Accordingly, this young woman omitted

no opportunity of dropping a word in favour of Falcon. For one thing, she said to Mrs. Staines, "Mr. Falcon must be very fond of children, ma'am. Why, he worships Master Christie."

"Indeed! I have not observed that."

"Why no, ma'am. He is rather shy over it; but when he sees us alone, he is sure to come to us, and say, 'Let me look at my child, nurse;' and he do seem fit to eat him. Onst he says to me, 'This boy is my heir, nurse.' What did he mean by that, ma'am?"

"I don't know."

"Is he any kin to you, ma'am?"

"None whatever. You must have misunderstood him. You should not repeat all that people say."

"No, ma'am; only I did think it so odd. Poor gentleman, I don't think he is happy, for all his money."

"He is too good to be unhappy all his life."

"So I think, ma'am."

These conversations were always short, for Rosa, though she was too kind and gentle to snub the girl, was also too delicate to give the least encouragement to her gossip.

But Rosa's was a mind that could be worked upon, and these short but repeated eulogies were not altogether without effect.

At last the insidious Falcon, by not making his approaches in a way to alarm her, acquired her friendship as well as her gratitude! and, in short, she got used to him and liked him. Not being bound by any limit of fact whatever, he entertained her, and took her out of herself a little by extemporaneous pictures; he told her all his thrilling adventures by flood and field, not one of which had ever occurred, yet he made them all sound like truth; he invented strange characters, and set them talking; he went after great whales, and harpooned one, which slapped his boat into

fragments with one stroke of its tail; then died, and he hung on by the harpoon protruding from the carcase till a ship came and picked him up. He shot a lion that was carrying off his favourite Hottentot. He encountered another, wounded him with both barrels, was seized, and dragged along the ground, and gave himself up for lost, but kept firing his revolver down the monster's throat till at last he sickened him, and so escaped out of death's maw; he did *not* say how he had fired in the air, and ridden fourteen miles on end, at the bare sight of a a lion's cub; but to compensate that one reserve, plunged into a raging torrent and saved a drowning woman by her long hair, which he caught in his teeth; he rode a race on an ostrich against a friend on a zebra, which went faster, but threw his rider and screamed with rage at not being able to eat him; he, Falcon, having declined to run, unless his friend's zebra was muzzled. He fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and

shot a wild elephant in the eye; and all this he enlivened with pictorial descriptions of no mean beauty, and as like South Africa as if it had been feu George Robins advertising that continent for sale.

In short, never was there a more voluble and interesting liar by word of mouth, and never was there a more agreeable creature interposed between a bereaved widow and her daily grief and regrets. He diverted her mind from herself, and did her good.

At last, such was the charm of infinite lying, she missed him on the days he did not come, and was brighter when he did come and lie.

Things went smoothly, and so pleasantly, that he would gladly have prolonged this form of courtship for a month or two longer, sooner than risk a premature declaration. But more than one cause drove him to a bolder course; his passion, which increased in violence by contact with its beautiful object, and also a great uneasiness he felt

at not hearing from Phœbe. This silence was ominous. He and she knew each other, and what the other was capable of. He knew she was the woman to cross the seas after him, if Staines left the diggings and any explanation took place that might point to his whereabouts.

These double causes precipitated matters, and at last he began to throw more devotion into his manner; and, having so prepared her for a few days, he took his opportunity and said, one day, "We are both unhappy. Give me the right to console you."

She coloured high, and said, "You have consoled me more than all the world. But there is a limit; always will be."

One less adroit would have brought her to the point; but this artist only sighed, and let the arrow rankle. By this means he out-fenced her; for now she had listened to a declaration and not stopped it short.

He played melancholy for a day or two, and then he tried her another way. He

said, "I promised your dying husband to be your protector, and a father to his child. I see but one way to keep my word, and that gives me courage to speak—without that I never could. Rosa, I loved you years ago, I am unmarried for your sake. Let me be your husband, and a father to your child."

Rosa shook her head. "I *could* not marry again. I esteem you. I am very grateful to you: and I know I behaved ill to you before. If I could marry again, it would be you. But I cannot. Oh, never! never!"

"Then we are both to be unhappy all our days."

"I shall, as I ought to be. You will not, I hope. I shall miss you sadly; but, for all that, I advise you to leave me. You will carry my everlasting gratitude, go where you will: that and my esteem are all I have to give."

"I will go," said he; "and I hope he

who is gone will forgive my want of courage."

"He who is gone took my promise never to marry again."

"Dying men see clearer. I am sure he wished—no matter; it is too delicate." He kissed her hand and went out, a picture of dejection.

Mrs. Staines shed a tear for him.

Nothing was heard of him for several days; and Rosa pitied him more and more, and felt a certain discontent with herself, and doubt whether she had done right.

Matters were in this state, when one morning Emily came screaming in from the garden, "The child!—Master Christie!—Where is he?—Where is he?"

The house was alarmed. The garden searched, the adjoining paddock. The child was gone.

Emily was examined, and owned, with many sobs and hysterical cries, that she had put him down in the summer-house for a

minute, while she went to ask the gardener for some balm, balm tea being a favourite drink of hers. "But there was nobody near that I saw," she sobbed.

Further inquiry proved, however, that a tall gipsy woman had been seen prowling about that morning; and suspicion instantly fastened on her. Servants were sent out right and left; but nothing discovered; and the agonised mother, terrified out of her wits, had Falcon telegraphed to immediately.

He came galloping down that very evening, and heard the story. He galloped into Gravesend, and, after seeing the police, sent word out he should advertise. He placarded Gravesend with bills, offering a reward of a thousand pounds, the child to be brought to him, and no questions asked.

Meantime the police and many of the neighbouring gentry came about the miserable mother with their vague ideas.

Down comes Falcon again next day; tells

what he has done, and treats them all with contempt. "Don't you be afraid, Mrs. Staines," said he. "You will get him back. I have taken the sure way. This sort of rogues dare not go near the police, and the police can't find them. You have no enemies; it is only some woman that has fancied a beautiful child. Well, she can have them by the score, for a thousand pounds."

He was the only one with a real idea; the woman saw it, and clung to him. He left late at night.

Next morning out came the advertisements, and he sent her a handful by special messenger. His zeal and activity kept her bereaved heart from utter despair.

At eleven that night came a telegraph:—

"I have got him. Coming down by special train."

Then what a burst of joy and gratitude!

The very walls of the house seemed to ring with it as a harp rings with music. A special train, too! he would not let the mother yearn all night.

At one in the morning, he drove up with the child and a hired nurse.

Imagine the scene! The mother's screams of joy, her furious kisses, her cooing, her tears, and all the miracles of nature at such a time. The servants all mingled with their employers in the general rapture, and Emily, who was pale as death, cried and sobbed, and said, "Oh, ma'am, I'll never let him out of my sight again, no, not for one minute." Falcon made her a signal, and went out. She met him in the garden.

She was much agitated, and cried, "Oh, you did well to bring him to-day. I could not have kept it another hour. I'm a wretch."

"You are a good kind girl; and here's the fifty pounds I promised you."

"Well, and I have earned it."

"Of course you have. Meet me in the garden to-morrow morning, and I'll show you you have done a kind thing to your mistress, as well as me. And, as for the fifty pounds, that is *nothing;* do you hear? it is nothing at all, compared with what I will do for you, if you will be true to me, and hold your tongue."

"Oh! as for that, my tongue shan't betray you, nor shame *me.* You are a gentleman, and I do think you love her, or I would not help you."

So she salved her nursemaid's conscience —with the help of the fifty pounds.

The mother was left to her rapture that night. In the morning Falcon told his tale.

"At two P.M. a man had called on him, and had produced one of his advertisements, and had asked him if that was all square— no bobbies on the lurk. 'All square, my fine fellow.' 'Well,' said he, 'I suppose you are a gentleman.' 'I am of that opinion too.' 'Well, sir,' says he, 'I know a party

as has *found* a young gent as comes werry nigh your advertisement.' 'It will be a very lucky find to that party,' I said, 'if he is on the square.' 'Oh, *we* are always on the square, when the blunt is put down.' 'The blunt for the child, when you like, and where you like, said I. 'You are the right sort,' said he. 'I am,' replied I. 'Will you come and see if it is all right?' said he. 'In a minute,' said I. Stepped into my bedroom, and loaded my six-shooter."

"What is that?" said Lusignan.

"A revolver with six barrels: by-the-by, the very same I killed the lion with. Ugh! I never think of that scene, without feeling a little quiver; and my nerves are pretty good, too. Well, he took me into an awful part of the town, down a filthy close, into some boozing ken—I beg pardon, some thieves' public-house."

"Oh, my dear friend'," said Rosa, "were you not frightened?"

"Shall I tell you the truth, or play the hero? I think I'll tell *you* the truth. I felt a little frightened, lest they should get my money and my life, without my getting my godson: that is what I call him now. Well, two ugly dogs came in, and said, 'Let us see the flimsies, before you see the kid.'"

"'That is rather sharp practice, I think,' said I; 'however, here's the swag, and here's the watch-dog.' So I put down the notes, and my hand over them with my revolver cocked, and ready to fire."

"Yes, yes," said Rosa, pantingly. "Ah, you were a match for them."

"Well, Mrs. Staines, if I was writing you a novel, I suppose I should tell you the rogues recoiled; but the truth is they only laughed, and were quite pleased. 'Swell's in earnest,' said one, 'Jem, show the kid.' Jem whistled, and in came a great tall black gipsy woman, with the darling. My heart was in my mouth, but I would not let them see it. I said, 'It is all right. Take half the notes

here, and half at the door.' They agreed, and then I did it quick, walked to the door, took the child, gave them the odd notes, and made off as fast as I could: hired a nurse at the hospital—and the rest you know."

"Papa," said Rosa, with enthusiasm, "there is but one man in England who would have got me back my child; and this is he."

When they were alone, Falcon told her she had said words that gladdened his very heart. "You admit I can carry out one half of his wishes?" said he.

Mrs. Staines said "Yes:" then coloured high: then, to turn it off, said, "But I cannot allow you to lose that large sum of money. You must let me repay you."

"Large sum of money!" said he. "It is no more to me than sixpence to most people. I don't know what to do with my money; and I never shall know, unless you will make a sacrifice of your own feelings, to the wishes of the dead. Oh, Mrs. Staines—

Rosa, do pray consider that a man of that wisdom sees the future, and gives wise advice. Sure am I that, if you could overcome your natural repugnance to a second marriage, it would be the best thing for your little boy—I love him already as if he were my own—and, in time, would bring you peace, and comfort, and some day, years hence, even happiness. You are my only love: yet I should never have come to you again, if *he* had not sent me. Do consider how strange it all is, and what it points to, and don't let me have the misery of losing you again, when you can do no better now, alas, than reward my fidelity."

She was much moved at this artful appeal, and said, "If I was sure I was obeying his will. But how can I feel that, when we both promised never to wed again?"

"A man's dying words are more sacred than any other. You have his letter."

"Yes, but he does not say 'marry again.'"

"That is what he meant, though."

"How can you say that? How can you know?"

"Because I put the words he said to me together with that short line to you. Mind, I don't say that he did not exaggerate my poor merits; on the contrary, I think he did. But I declare to you that he did hope I should take care of you and your child. Right or wrong, it was his wish: so pray do not deceive yourself on that point."

This made more impression on her than anything else he could say, and she said, "I promise you one thing: I will never marry any man but you."

Instead of pressing her further, as an inferior artist would, he broke into raptures, kissed her hand tenderly, and was in such high spirits, and so voluble all day, that she smiled sweetly on him, and thought to herself, "Poor soul! how happy I could make him with a word!"

As he was always watching her face—

a practice he carried further than any person living—he divined that sentiment, and wrought upon it so, that at last he tormented her into saying she would marry him *some day.*

When he had brought her to that, he raged inwardly, to think he had not two years to work in: for it was evident she would marry him in time. But no, it had taken him more than four months, close siege, to bring her to that. No word from Phœbe. An ominous dread hung over his own soul. His wife would be upon him, or, worse still, her brother Dick, who, he knew would beat him to a mummy on the spot; or, worst of all, the husband of Rosa Staines, who would kill him, or fling him into a prison. He *must* make a push.

In this emergency he used his ally, Mr. Lusignan; he told him Mrs. Staines had promised to marry him, but at some distant date. This would not do: he must look after his enormous interests in the colony,

and he was so much in love, he could not leave her.

The old gentleman was desperately fond of Falcon, and bent on the match, and he actually consented to give his daughter, what Falcon called, a little push.

The little push was a very great one, I think.

It consisted in directing the clergyman to call in church the banns of marriage between Reginald Falcon and Rosa Staines.

They were both in church together when this was done. Rosa all but screamed, and then turned red as fire, and white as a ghost, by turns. She never stood up again all the service; and, in going home, refused Falcon's arm, and walked swiftly home by herself. Not that she had the slightest intention of passing this monstrous thing by in silence. On the contrary, her wrath was boiling over, and so hot that she knew she should make a scene in the street, if she said a word there.

Once inside the house, she turned on

Falcon, with a white cheek and a flashing eye, and said, "Follow me, sir, if you please." She led the way to her father's study. "Papa," said she, "I throw myself on your protection. Mr. Falcon has affronted me."

"Oh, Rosa!" cried Falcon, affecting utter dismay.

"Publicly—publicly: he has had the banns of marriage cried in the church, without my permission."

"Don't raise your voice so loud, child. All the house will hear you."

"I choose all the house to hear me. I will not endure it. I will never marry you now—never!"

"Rosa, my child," said Lusignan, "you need not scold poor Falcon, for I am the culprit. It was I who ordered the banns to be cried."

"Oh! papa, you had no right to do such a thing as that."

"I think I had. I exercised parental

authority for once, and for your good, and for the good of a true and faithful lover of yours, whom you jilted once, and now you trifle with his affection and his interests. He loves you too well to leave you; yet you know his vast estates and interests require supervision."

"That for his vast estates!" said Rosa, contemptuously. "I am not to be driven to the altar like this, when my heart is in the grave. Don't you do it again, papa, or I'll get up and forbid the banns; affront for affront."

"I should like to see that," said the old gentleman, drily.

Rosa vouchsafed no reply, but swept out of the room, with burning cheeks and glittering eyes, and was not seen all day, would not dine with them, in spite of three humble deprecating notes Falcon sent her.

"Let the spiteful cat alone," said old Lusignan. "You and I will dine together in peace and quiet."

It was a dull dinner; but Falcon took advantage of the opportunity, impregnated the father with his views, and got him to promise to have the banns cried next Sunday. He consented.

Rosa learned next Sunday morning that this was to be done, and her courage failed her. She did not go to church at all.

She cried a great deal, and submitted to violence, as your true women are too apt to do. They had compromised her, and so conquered her. The permanent feelings of gratitude and esteem caused a reaction after her passion, and she gave up open resistance as hopeless.

Falcon renewed his visits, and was received with the mere sullen languor of a woman who has given in.

The banns were cried a third time.

Then the patient Rosa bought laudanum enough to reunite her to her Christopher, in spite of them all; and, having provided her-

self with this resource, became more cheerful, and even kind and caressing.

She declined to name the day at present, and that was awkward. Nevertheless the conspirators felt sure they should tire her out into doing that, before long; for they saw their way clear, and she was perplexed in the extreme.

In her perplexity, she used to talk to a certain beautiful star she called her Christopher. She loved to fancy he was now an inhabitant of that bright star; and often on a clear night she would look up, and beg for guidance from this star. This I consider foolish: but then I am old and sceptical; she was still young and innocent, and sorely puzzled to know her husband's real will.

I don't suppose the star had anything to do with it, except as a focus of her thoughts; but one fine night, after a long inspection of Christopher's star, she dreamed a dream. She thought that a lovely wedding-dress hung over a chair, that a crown of diamonds

as large as almonds sparkled ready for her on the dressing-table, and she was undoing her black gown, and about to take it off, when suddenly the diamonds began to pale, and the white satin dress to melt away, and in its place there rose a pale face and a long beard, and Christopher Staines stood before her, and said quietly, "Is this how you keep your vow?" Then he sank slowly, and the white dress was black, and the diamonds were jet; and she awoke, with his gentle words of remonstrance, and his very tones ringing in her ear.

This dream, co-operating with her previous agitation and misgivings, shook her very much; she did not come down-stairs till near dinner-time; and both her father and Falcon, who came as a matter of course to spend his Sunday, were struck with her appearance. She was pale, gloomy, morose, and had an air of desperation about her.

Falcon would not see it; he knew that it is safest to let her sex alone, when they look

like that; and then the storm sometimes subsides of itself.

After dinner, Rosa retired early; and soon she was heard walking rapidly up and down the dressing-room.

This was quite unusual, and made a noise.

Papa Lusignan thought it inconsiderate; and, after awhile, remarking, gently, that he was not particularly fond of sound, he proposed they should smoke the pipe of peace on the lawn.

They did so; but after a while, finding that Falcon was not smoking, he said, "Don't let me detain you. Rosa is alone."

Falcon took the hint, and went to the drawing-room. Rosa met him on the stairs, with a scarf over her shoulders. "I must speak to papa," said she. "Where is he?"

"He is on the lawn, dear Rosa," said Falcon, in his most dulcet tones. He was sure of his ally, and very glad to use him as a buffer to receive the first shock.

So he went into the drawing-room, where all the lights were burning, and quietly took up a book. But he did not read a line; he was too occupied in trying to read his own future.

The mean villain, who is incapable of remorse, is, of all men, most capable of fear. His villainy had, to all appearance, reached the goal; for he felt sure that all Rosa's struggles would, sooner or later, succumb to her sense of gratitude and his strong will and patient temper. But when the victory was won, what a life! He must fly with her to some foreign country, pursued from pillar to post by an enraged husband, and by the offended law. And, if he escaped the vindictive foe a year or two, how could he escape that other enemy he knew, and dreaded—poverty? He foresaw he should come to hate the woman he was about to wrong, and she would instantly revenge herself, by making him an exile and, soon or late, a prisoner, or a pauper.

While these misgivings battled with his base but ardent passion, strange things were going on out of doors—but they will be best related in another sequence of events, to which, indeed, they fairly belong.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Staines and Mrs. Falcon landed at Plymouth, and went up to town by the same train. They parted in London, Staines to go down to Gravesend, Mrs. Falcon to visit her husband's old haunts, and see if she could find him.

She did not find him; but she heard of him, and learned that he always went down to Gravesend from Saturday till Monday.

Notwithstanding all she had said to Staines, the actual information startled her, and gave her a turn. She was obliged to sit down, for her knees seemed to give way. It was but a momentary weakness. She was now a wife and a mother, and had her rights. She said to herself, "My rogue

has turned that poor woman's head long before this, no doubt. But I shall go down and just bring him away by the ear."

For once her bitter indignation over-powered every other sentiment, and she lost no time, but, late as it was, went down to Gravesend, ordered a private sitting-room and bedroom for the night, and took a fly to Kent Villa.

But Christopher Staines had the start of her. He had already gone down to Gravesend with his carpet bag, left it at the inn, and walked to Kent Villa that lovely summer night, the happiest husband in England.

His heart had never for one instant been disturbed by Mrs. Falcon's monstrous suspicion; he looked on her as a monomaniac; a sensible woman insane on one point, her husband.

When he reached the villa, however, he thought it prudent to make sure that Falcon had come to England at all, and discharged

his commission. He would not run the risk, small as he thought it, of pouncing unexpected on his Rosa, being taken for a ghost, and terrifying her, or exciting her to madness.

Now the premises of Kent Villa were admirably adapted to what they call in war a reconnoissance. The lawn was studded with laurestinas and other shrubs that had grown magnificently in that Kentish air.

Staines had no sooner set his foot on the lawn, than he heard voices: he crept towards them from bush to bush; and, standing in impenetrable shade, he saw in the clear moonlight two figures—Mr. Lusignan and Reginald Falcon.

These two dropped out only a word or two at intervals; but what they did say struck Staines as odd. For one thing, Lusignan remarked, "I suppose you will want to go back to the Cape. Such enormous estates as yours will want looking after."

"Enormous estates!" said Staines to himself. "Then they must have grown very fast in a few months."

"Oh yes!" said Falcon; "but I think of showing her a little of Europe first."

Staines thought this still more mysterious; he waited to hear more, but the succeeding remarks were of an ordinary kind.

He noticed, however, that Falcon spoke of his wife by her Christian name, and that neither party mentioned Christopher Staines. He seemed quite out of their little world.

He began to feel a strange chill creep down him.

Presently Falcon went off to join Rosa; and Staines thought it was quite time to ask the old gentleman whether Falcon had executed his commission, or not.

He was only hesitating how to do it, not liking to pounce in the dark on a man who abhorred everything like excitemeut, when Rosa herself came flying out in great agitation.

Oh! the thrill he felt at the sight of her! With all his self-possession, he would have sprung forward and taken her in his arms with a mighty cry of love, if she had not immediately spoken words that rooted him to the spot with horror. But she came with the words in her very mouth: "Papa, I am come to tell you I cannot, and will not, marry Mr. Falcon."

"Oh yes, you will, my dear."

"Never! I'll die sooner. Not that you will care for that. I tell you I saw my Christopher last night—in a dream. He had a beard; but I saw him, oh so plain: and he said, "Is this the way you keep your promise?" That is enough for me. I have prayed, again and again, to his star, for light. I am so perplexed and harassed by you all, and you make me believe what you like. Well, I have had a revelation. It is not my poor lost darling's wish I should wed again. I don't believe Mr. Falcon any more. I hear nothing but lies

by day. The truth comes to my bed-side at night. I will not marry this man."

"Consider, Rosa, your credit is pledged. You must not be always jilting him heartlessly. Dreams! nonsense. There—I love peace. It is no use your storming at me; rave to the moon and the stars, if you like, and when you have done, do pray come in, and behave like a rational woman, who has pledged her faith to an honourable man, and a man of vast estates—a man that nursed your husband in his last illness, found your child, at a great expense, when you had lost him, and merits eternal gratitude, not eternal jilting. I have no patience with you."

The old gentleman retired in high dudgeon.

Staines stood in the black shade of his cedar-tree, rooted to the ground by this revelation of male villainy and female credulity.

He did not know what on earth to do.

He wanted to kill Falcon, but not to terrify his own wife to death. It was now too clear she thought he was dead.

Rosa watched her father's retiring figure out of sight. "Very well," said she, clenching her teeth; then suddenly she turned, and looked up to heaven. "Do you hear?" said she, "my Christie's star? I am a poor perplexed creature. I asked you for a sign: and that very night I saw him in a dream. Why should I marry, out of gratitude? Why should I marry one man, when I love another? What does it matter his being dead? I love him too well to be wife to any living man. They persuade me, they coax me, they pull me, they push me. I see they will make me. But I will outwit them. See—see!" and she held up a little phial in the moonlight. "This shall cut the knot for me: this shall keep me true to my Christie, and save me from breaking promises I ought never to have made. This shall unite

me once more with him I killed, and loved."

She meant she would kill herself the night before the wedding, which perhaps she would not, and perhaps she would. Who can tell? The weak are violent. But Christopher, seeing the poison so near her lips, was perplexed, took two strides, wrenched it out of her hand, with a snarl of rage, and instantly plunged into the shade again.

Rosa uttered a shriek, and flew into the house.

The farther she got, the more terrified she became, and soon Christopher heard her screaming in the drawing-room in an alarming way. They were like the screams of the insane.

He got terribly anxious, and followed her. All the doors were open.

As he went up-stairs, he heard her cry, "His ghost! his ghost! I have seen his ghost! No, no. I feel his hand upon my

arm now. A beard! and so he had in the dream! He is alive. My darling is alive. You have deceived me. You are an impostor—a villain. Out of the house this moment, or he shall kill you."

"Are you mad?" cried Falcon. "How can he be alive, when I saw him dead?"

This was too much. Staines gave the door a blow with his arm, and strode into the apartment, looking white and tremendous.

Falcon saw death in his face; gave a shriek, drew his revolver, and fired at him with as little aim as he had at the lioness; then made for the open window. Staines seized a chair, followed him, and hurled it at him, and the chair and the man went through the window together, and then there was a strange thud heard outside.

Rosa gave a loud scream, and swooned away.

Staines laid his wife flat on the floor, got the women about her, and at last she

began to give the usual signs of returning life.

Staines said, to the oldest woman there, "If she sees me, she will go off again. Carry her to her room; and tell her, by degrees, that I am alive."

All this time Papa Lusignan had sat trembling and whimpering in a chair, moaning, "This is a painful scene—very painful." But at last an idea struck him—"WHY, YOU HAVE ROBBED THE OFFICE!"

Scarcely was Mrs. Staines out of the room, when a fly drove up, and this was immediately followed by violent and continuous screaming close under the window.

"Oh dear!" sighed Papa Lusignan.

They ran down, and found Falcon impaled at full length on the spikes of the villa, and Phœbe screaming over him, and trying in vain to lift him off them. He had struggled a little, in silent terror, but had then fainted from fear and loss of blood, and, lying rather inside the rails, which

were high, he could not be extricated from the outside.

As soon as his miserable condition was discovered, the servants ran down into the kitchen, and so up to the rails by the area steps. These rails had caught him; one had gone clean through his arm, the other had penetrated the fleshy part of the thigh, and a third pierced his ear.

They got him off; but he was insensible, and the place drenched with his blood.

Phœbe clutched Staines by the arm. "Let me know the worst," said she. "Is he dead?"

Staines examined him, and said, "No."

"Can you save him?"

"I?"

"Yes. Who can, if you cannot? Oh, have mercy on me!" and she went on her knees to him, and put her forehead on his knees.

He was touched by her simple faith; and the noble traditions of his profession sided

with his gratitude to this injured woman. "My poor friend," said he, "I will do my best, for *your* sake."

He took immediate steps for stanching the blood: and the fly carried Phœbe and her villain to the inn at Gravesend.

Falcon came to on the road; but, finding himself alone with Phœbe, shammed unconsciousness of everything but pain.

Staines, being thoroughly enraged with Rosa, yet remembering his solemn vow never to abuse her again, saw her father, and told him to tell her he should think over her conduct quietly, not wishing to be harder upon her than she deserved.

Rosa, who had been screaming, and crying for joy, ever since she came to her senses, was not so much afflicted at this message as one might have expected. He was alive, and all things else were trifles.

Nevertheless, when day after day went by, and not even a line from Christopher, she began to fear he would cast her off

entirely; the more so as she heard he was now and then at Gravesend to visit Mrs. Falcon at the inn.

While matters were thus, Uncle Philip burst on her like a bomb. "He is alive! he is alive! he is alive!" And they had a cuddle over it.

"Oh, Uncle Philip! Have you seen him?"

"Seen him? Yes. He caught me on the hop, just as I came in from Italy. I took him for a ghost."

"Oh, weren't you frightened?"

"Not a bit. I don't mind ghosts. I'd have half a dozen to dinner every day, if I might choose 'em. I couldn't stand stupid ones. But I say, his temper isn't improved by all this dying: he is in an awful rage with you; and what for?"

"Oh, uncle, what for? Because I'm the vilest of women!"

"Vilest of fiddlesticks! It's his fault, not yours. Shouldn't have died. It's always a dangerous experiment."

"*I* shall die if he will not forgive me. He keeps away from me, and from his child."

"I'll tell you. He heard, in Gravesend, your banns had been cried: that has moved the peevish fellow's bile."

"It was done without my consent. Papa will tell you so: and oh, uncle, if you knew the arts, the forged letter in my darling's hand, the way he wrought on me. Oh, villain! villain! Uncle, forgive your poor silly niece, that the world is too wicked and too clever for her to live in."

"Because you are too good and innocent," said Uncle Philip. "There, don't you be downhearted. I'll soon bring you two together again: a couple of ninnies. I'll tell you what is the first thing. You must come and live with me. Come at once, bag and baggage. He won't show here, the sulky brute."

Philip Staines had a large house in Cavendish Square, a crusty old patient, like

himself, had left him. It was his humour to live in a corner of this mansion, though the whole was capitally furnished by his judicious purchases at auctions.

He gave Rosa, and her boy, and his nurse, the entire first floor, and told her she was there for life. "Look here," said he, "this last affair has opened my eyes. Such women as you are the sweeteners of existence. You leave my roof no more. Your husband will make the same discovery. Let him run about and be miserable a bit. He will have to come to book."

She shook her head sadly.

"My Christopher will never say a harsh word to me. All the worse for me. He will quietly abandon a creature so inferior to him."

"Stuff!"

Now she was always running to the window, in hope that Cristopher would call on his uncle, and that she might see him; and one day she gave a scream so eloquent,

Philip knew what it meant. "Get you behind that screen, you and your boy," said he, "and be as still as mice. Stop—give me that letter the scoundrel forged, and the ring."

This was hardly done, and Rosa out of sight, and trembling from head to foot, when Christopher was announced. Philp received him very affectionately, but wasted no time.

"Been to Kent Villa yet?"

"No," was the grim reply.

"Why not?"

"Because I have sworn never to say an angry word to her again; and, if I was to go there, I should say a good many angry ones. Oh! when I think that her folly drove me to sea, to do my best for her, and that I was nearer death for that woman than ever man was, and lost my reason for her, and went through toil and privations, hunger, exile, mainly for her, and then to find the banns cried in open church, with that scoundrel—say no more, uncle. I

shall never reproach her, and never forgive her."

"She was deceived."

"I don't doubt that; but nobody has a right to be so great a fool as all that."

"It was not her folly, but her innocence that was imposed on. You a philosopher, and not know that wisdom itself is sometime imposed on, and deceived by cunning folly! Have you forgotten your Milton?—

'At Wisdom's gate, Suspicion sleeps,
And deems no ill where no ill seems.'

Come, come; are you sure you are not a little to blame? Did you write home the moment you found you were not dead?"

Christopher coloured high.

"Evidently not," said the keen old man. "Ah! my fine fellow, have I found the flaw in your own armour?"

"I did wrong, but it was for her. I sinned—for her. I could not bear her to be without money; and I knew the insurance—I sinned for her. She has sinned *against* me."

"And she had much better have sinned against God—hadn't she? He is more forgiving than we perfect creatures, that cheat insurance companies. And so, my fine fellow, you hid the truth from her for two or three months."

No answer.

"Strike off those two or three months; would the banns have ever been cried?"

"Well, uncle," said Christopher, hard pressed, "I am glad she has got a champion; and I hope you will always keep your eye on her."

"I mean to."

"Good morning."

"No; don't be in a hurry. I have something else to say, not so provoking. Do you know the arts by which she was made to believe you wished her to marry again?"

"I wished her to marry again! Are you mad, uncle?"

"Whose handwriting is on this envelope?"

"Mine, to be sure."

"Now read the letter."

Christopher read the forged letter.

"Oh, monstrous!"

"This was given her with your ruby ring, and a tale so artful that nothing we read about the devil comes near it. This was what did it. The Earl of Tadcaster brought her title, and wealth, and love."

"What, he too! The little cub I saved, and lost myself for—blank him! blank him.

"Why, you stupid ninny; you forget you were dead; and he could not help loving her; how could he? Well, but you see she refused him; and why? because he came without a forged letter from *you*. Do you doubt her love for you?"

"Of course I do. She never loved me as I loved her."

"Christopher, don't you say that before me, or you and I shall quarrel. Poor girl! she lay in my sight as near death for you as

you were for her. I'll show you something."

He went to a cabinet, and took out a silver paper; he unpinned it, and laid Rosa's beautiful black hair upon her husband's knees. "Look at that, you hard-hearted brute!" he roared to Christopher, who sat, anything but hard-hearted, his eyes filling fast, at the sad proof of his wife's love and suffering.

Rosa could bear no more. She came out with her boy in her hand. "Oh, uncle, do not speak harshly to him, or you will kill me quite."

She came across the room, a picture of timidity and penitence, with her whole eloquent body bent forward at an angle. She kneeled at his knees, with streaming eyes, and held her boy up to him: "Plead for your poor mother, my darling; she mourns her fault, and will never excuse it."

The cause was soon decided. All Philip's logic was nothing, compared with mighty

nature. Christopher gave one great sob, and took his darling to his heart, without one word; and he and Rosa clung together, and cried over each other. Philip slipped out of the room, and left the restored ones together.

I have something more to say about my hero and heroine; but must first deal with other characters, not wholly uninteresting to the reader, I hope.

Dr. Staines directed Phœbe Falcon how to treat her husband. No medicine, no stimulants; very wholesome food, in moderation, and the temperature of the body regulated by tepid water. Under these instructions, the injured, but still devoted, wife, was the real healer. He pulled through, but was lame for life, and ridiculously lame, for he went with a spring halt, a sort of hop and go one that made the girls laugh, and vexed Adonis.

Phœbe found the diamonds, and offered

them all to Staines, in expiation of his villainy. "See," she said, "he has only spent one."

Staines said he was glad of it, for her sake; for he must be just to his own family. He sold them for three thousand two hundred pounds; but for the big diamond he got twelve thousand pounds, and I believe it was worth double the money.

Counting the two sums, and deducting six hundred for the stone Mr. Falcon had embezzled, he gave her over seven thousand pounds.

She stared at him, and changed colour at so large a sum. "But I have no claim on that, sir."

"That is a good joke," said he "Why you and I are partners in the whole thing—you and I and Dick. Was it not with his horse and rifle I bought the big diamond? Poor dear, honest, manly Dick. No, the money is honestly yours, Mrs.

Falcon; but don't trust a penny to your husband."

"He will never see it, sir. I shall take him back, and give him all his heart can ask for, with this; but he will be little more than a servant in the house now, as long as Dick is single: I know that;" and she could still cry at the humiliation of her villain.

Staines made her promise to write to him; and she did write him a sweet womanly letter, to say that they were making an enormous fortune, and hoped to end their days in England. Dick sent his kind love, and thanks.

I will add, what she only said by implication, that she was happy after all. She still contrived to love the thing she could not respect. Once, when an officious friend pitied her for her husband's lameness, she said, "Find me a face like his. The lamer the better; he can't run after the girls, like *some*."

Dr. Staines called on Lady Cicely Treherne; the footman stared. He left his card.

A week afterwards, she called on him. She had a pink tinge in her cheeks, a general animation, and her face full of brightness and archness.

"Bless me!" said he, bluntly, "is this you? How you are improved!"

"Yes," said she; "and I am come to thank you for your pwescwiption: I followed it to the lettaa."

"Woe is me! I have forgotten it."

"You diwected me to mawwy an ice man."

"Never: I hate a nice man."

"No, no—an Iwishman: and I have done it."

"Good gracious! you dont mean that! I must be more cautious in my prescriptions. After all, it seems to agree."

"Admiwably."

"He loves you?"

"To distwaction."

"He amuses you?"

"Pwodigiously. Come and see."

Dr. and Mrs. Staines live with Uncle Philip. The insurance money is returned, but the diamond money makes them very easy. Staines follows his profession now under great advantages; a noble house, rent free, the curiosity that attaches to a man who has been canted out of a ship in mid-ocean, and lives to tell it; and then Lord Tadcaster, married into another noble house, swears by him, and talks of him; so does Lady Cicely Munster, late Treherne; and when such friends as these are warm, it makes a physician the centre of an important *clientelle;* but his best friend of all is his unflagging industry, and his truly wonderful diagnosis, which resembles divination. He has the ball at his feet, and above all, that without which worldly success soon palls, a happy home, a fireside warm with sympathy.

Mrs. Staines is an admiring, sympathising wife, and an admirable housekeeper. She still utters inadvertencies now and then, commits new errors at odd times, but never repeats them when exposed. Observing which docility, Uncle Philip has been heard to express a fear that, in twenty years, she will be the wisest woman in England. "But, thank heaven!" he adds, "I shall be gone before that."

Her conduct and conversation afford this cynic constant food for observation; and he has delivered himself oracularly at various stages of the study: but I cannot say that his observations, taken as a whole, present that consistency which entitles them to be regarded as a body of philosophy. Examples: In the second month after Mrs. Staines came to live with him, he delivered himself thus: "My niece Rosa is an anomaly. She gives you the impression she is shallow. Mind your eye: in one moment she will take you out of your depth

or any man's depth. She is like those country streams I used to fish for pike when I was young; you go along, seeing the bottom everywhere; but presently you come to a corner, and it is fifteen feet deep all in a moment, and souse you go over head and ears: that's my niece Rosa."

In six months he had got to this—and, mind you, each successive dogma was delivered in a loud, aggressive tone, and in sublime oblivion of the preceding oracle—"My niece Rosa is the most artful woman. (You may haw! haw! haw! as much as you like. You have not found out her little game—I have). What is the aim of all women? To be beloved by an unconscionable number of people. Well, she sets up for a simpleton, and so disarms all the brilliant people, and they love her. Everybody loves her. Just you put her down in a room with six clever women, and you will see who is the favourite. She looks as shal-

low as a pond, and she is as deep as the ocean."

At the end of the year he threw off the mask altogether. "The great sweetener of a man's life," said he, "is 'a simpleton.' I shall not go abroad any more; my house has become attractive: I've got a simpleton. When I have a headache, her eyes fill with tender concern, and she hovers about me and pesters me with pillows: when I am cross with her, she is afraid I am ill. When I die, and leave her a lot of money, she will howl for months, and say I don't want his money: 'I waw-waw-waw-waw-want my Uncle Philip, to love me, and scold me.' One day she told me, with a sigh, I hadn't lectured her for a month. 'I am afraid I have offended you,' says she, 'or else worn you out, dear.' When I am well, give me a simpleton, to make me laugh. When I am ill, give me a simpleton to soothe me with her innocent tenderness. A simpleton shall wipe the dews of death,

and close my eyes: and, when I cross the river of death, let me be met by a band of the heavenly host, who were all simpletons here on earth, and too good for such a hole, so now they are in heaven, and their garments always white—because there are no laundresses there."

Arrived at this point, the Anglo-Saxon race will retire, grinning, to fresh pastures, and leave this champion of "a Simpleton," to thunder paradoxes in a desert.

THE END.

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